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THE REIGN OF MU'TAŞİM
(218-227/833-42)

by

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A B S T R A C T

This study is divided into five Chapters with an introduction and a note on the end of the reign.

The first of these Chapters points out some of the changes which took place in the army and administration under Ma'mūn and discusses his policies of succession, of the Inquisition (Miḥna) and of the renewal of war against Byzantium.

The second is devoted to the early life of Mu'taṣim, his role in Abbasid politics till his accession and the problems which he had to face afterwards.

Chapter III deals with the recruitment of the so-called "Turkish" slaves, their origins and numbers, the role they played under Mu'taṣim and the circumstances which favoured their rise to high positions.

Chapter IV discusses the reasons for the move from Baghdād, the founding of Sāmarra and the settling of the various groups there.

The last Chapter is a survey of the major events of the reign bringing out their similarities and differences and their significance in that period.

No separate survey of the sources was made as these have been the subject of a number of studies (cf. Bibliography: Barthold, Dūri, Gibb, Lewis, Rosenthal and Wellhausen). It is to be pointed out that the lack of information on the court and the administration, so noticeable in this period (e.g. Ṭabari says very little about Mu'taṣim and includes no list of governors for his reign) might not only have been due to the fact that in the newly founded Sāmarra neither the court nor the city was the centre of the cultural activities of Iraq but also to a general lack of interest in what happened to the Caliphs who were then isolated with their troops in the garrison capital.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T

I am greatly indebted to Professor Bernard Lewis of the University of London for his kind attention and invaluable advice throughout the preparation of this study.

O.S.A. Ismail

C O N T E N T S

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Abbreviations used in the Footnotes and the
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BSOAS.	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.
EI.	Encyclopaedia of Islam.
E.M.	Elma Marin for her translation of the Reign of Mu'taṣim.
IC.	Islamic Culture.
JA.	Journal Asiatique.
JAOS.	Journal of the American Oriental Society.
JWH.	Journal of World History.
MW.	Muslim World.
RSO.	Rivista degli Studi Orientali.
SI.	Studia Islamica.
SOAS.	School of Oriental and African Studies.

Introduction

Mu'taṣim the eighth Abbasid caliph came to power two centuries after the death of the Prophet in 632. A great deal had taken place within these two hundred years. In the reign of the first caliph, Abū Bakr (632-634), the Umma of Medina had conquered Arabia and started the conquest of Iraq and Syria. By the end of the reign of the second caliph, 'Umar, in 644, the Islamic Empire had almost reached what can be called its historical frontiers.¹ What was added later was little compared to the conquests of these 12 years of the reigns of the first two caliphs. Moreover the migratory wave of the Arab nation, caused by the pressure of population in Arabia and led by Islam, had also spent itself by the end of these 12 years. What remained of it was soon to be spent in two great civil wars, the first ending the period of the Patriarchal Caliphate and establishing the Umayyad dynasty under Mu'awiya, 661-680, and the second confirming the same dynasty under 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, 685-705. These two wars saw the triumph of the practical politics of the Umayyads, supported by the majority of the Arab tribes

1. Cf. R. Roelvink: Historical Atlas of the Muslim Peoples, London, 1957.

over the theocracy of Medina. They saw also the last efforts of Medina to establish its power over the empire which it together with the rest of Arabia, had created. The Patriarchal Caliphate was replaced by a "secular state" ruled by an "Arab Caste". Hijaz together with the rest of Arabia were relegated to a secondary place, and but for the holy places of Mecca and Medina they would have meant nothing to the Islamic Empire and the Muslim World.

Yet if Medina and Hijāz were defeated by Damascus and Syria, the spirit of Medina, leading the powers in Iraq and Khurāsān, and benefiting from the political development under the Umayyads, was soon to ensure a final victory over its opponents. An "Arab Caste" was not to rule the Islamic Empire. The Arabs have spent their energies in establishing the Islamic Empire and inheriting its rule on the basis of an Arab State. It was now the turn of the Muslims to establish an "Islamic" state. Yet another civil war was in store. The wars of conquests had scattered the Arabs far and wide. While Arabicizing and Islamizing the conquered peoples, they themselves had not remained uninfluenced by their new environment. The time when a 'Muslim' meant an "Arab" was soon replaced by a time when it meant mostly

otherwise except in Arabia proper. The majority of the Muslims were now not of Arab descent (though many of them pretended to be.) Nor were those of them who were Arabs, all supporters of the Umayyad rule. These factors, coupled with the existence of social and economic injustices to the non-Arab Muslims in a period of great economic and social development, resulted in the Abbasid Revolution of 750. It is true that the 'Abbasids were an Arab dynasty. But this time it had come to power on "Islamic" ideals. It was no longer the rule of an Arab Caste.

However, this was by no means the end of the civil wars which took place in these two hundred years preceding the reign of Mu'tasim. There was yet a fourth one, close at hand (not to mention the 'Alid, Khārijite and other revolts which continued to take place). The absence in the Qur'an and Tradition of a clear and definite rule regarding succession was a great factor in nearly all the crisis which took place in this period. Problems did arise even when the consensus of opinion meant that of Medina, Damascus or Baghdād and when these expressed the opinion of the community at large. Indeed this could only be said of Medina alone and that only till the death of 'Umar I in 644. Afterwards it was power

which decided succession, power often expressed in civil wars. And thus was the Civil War between Amīn and Ma'mun, the two sons of Hārūn al-Rashīd and brothers of Mu'tasim. The victory fell to Ma'mun who, although the eldest and ablest of the two, was put second by Hārūn. But his victory meant no change of dynasty nor a victory of Persians over Arabs. The Abbasid dynasty continued to rule. Military power based on human resources was far easier to acquire and to manage in the eastern provinces than in Iraq, settled and urbanized.

Unpeaceful as these two centuries were, they were very much like the "two centuries of peace" of the Roman Empire, a witness to great development in all respects of life. Suffice it to say that Baghdād then reached the height of its greatness. Considering the Islamic empire at large one sees a number of great cities, ranging from Qairawān in the west to Marw in the east. These cities had already become centres of learning and administration, developing gradually local characteristics and local traditions. Five of these cities had been capitals of the Empire: Medina, Kūfa, Damascus, Baghdād and Marw. Looking at this from the angle of urbanization and cultural development with previous and later history in mind, one has to see them also in the context

of a swiftly acquired large empire with inadequate means of transport, the distribution of Arab tribes and their ratio to local population and the spread of different religious sects together with other quasi-religious movements. These were the causes of the regionalism which had already started to take root. For by now the Umayyads had been restored in Andalus, the Aghlabids had established an independent dynasty in North Africa, and the Tāhirids were already paving the way for their hegemony in Khurāsān. Moreover, the effects of urbanization and economic development visible in agriculture, trade, crafts, and town life, not only resulted in the creation of a relaxed and tolerant society but changed the nature of the relation between the caliphs and their subjects. Their interests were not the same. Urban and settled centres were not the sources of human power which the caliphs needed to secure their power and fight their wars. Nor were they like their predecessors to whom the Caliphate meant a great deal. State and Society were indeed moving in different directions governed by interests of a different even opposing nature.

CHAPTER I

The Legacy of the Previous Reign

The reign of Mu'tasim, was in many ways a continuation of that of Ma'mun. Mu'tasim had to contend with a number of problems bequeathed to him by his predecessor. In his religious policy, in his relations with the 'Alids, in his dealings with his secretaries and to a great extent in his policy of succession he was a faithful follower of Ma'mun. The latter's reign has been the subject of general as well as special studies. Certain aspects of his policies, especially those relating to the army and administration and to the significance of certain events and policies in relation to the position of the Abbasid Caliphs, are worthy of further consideration.

Ma'mun's reign began with a civil war. It ended in a fresh series of campaigns against Byzantium. In between it saw the advent of the Mu'tazila with Ma'mun's attempt to create something like a state doctrine, the introduction of new elements in large numbers in the army and a new approach to the problem of succession. It was a long reign - about twenty years 198-218/813-833 - but throughout

it was turbulent with uprisings and revolts in most of the Abbasid provinces.¹ These were not, however, the problems of a single reign but the problems of the Caliphate in general. In responding to them Ma'mūn seems consciously to have been searching for a permanent solution. Hence the significance of the events and the policies. While the Abbasid dynasty was faced with the problem of succession within itself and with regards to the 'Alids, the Caliphate as such was faced with the problem of imposing its power in a large empire of sharply delineated regions and a rising urban society.² Meanwhile Islam itself and Arab-Islamic culture were threatened by the spread of perso-aramaic culture and other religions.³

These problems were, perhaps, inherent in the nature and development of the Islamic Empire which rapidly found itself embracing within its boundaries a variety of regions, religions, peoples and cultures. Perhaps, too, that only after the Abbasid Revolution with all that preceded and followed it in the economic and social developments and the conversion of large numbers of people to Islam it was

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1. Tabari, events of the years 198-218; Bal'ami, IV same years.
 2. F. Gabrieli: al-Ma'mūn e gli 'Alidi passim; Gibb: The Evolution of Government; idem, Government and Islam.
 3. Gibb: The Social Significance; Goldziher: Muh. Studien, pp. 176-207.

natural that the clashes between religions, regions and cultures should have come to the fore.¹ Ma'mūn was known for his awareness, his share in and his contribution to the intellectual life of his age.² But the problems that seem to have concerned him most were those relating to politics and power. In ^{this} his experiences in the Civil War and immediately afterwards could not be ignored.³

The causes of the Civil War lay partly in Harūn's unwise policy of conferring the succession on his three sons Amīn, Ma'mūn and Qāsim consecutively; partly in the ambitions of the two elder sons and their respective parties.⁴ It was possible because the ruling province of Irāq was by no means the strongest militarily. In fact the distribution of wealth and power within the Abbasid Empire was such that no one province was all powerful over the others. One is tempted, because of this fact, to think that perhaps al-Rashīd was thinking of this when he divided the empire amongst his three sons, the idea being to secure the provinces as well as the administrative centre within the family. But that could

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1. Becker: Islam studien, p.13; Duri: 'A. 'A. 'A. pp.5-40; E.I.² s.v. Abbasids.
 2. See: A.F.Rāfā'i: 'Asr al-Ma'mūn.
 3. See: Sidqi Hamdi, The Civil War between Amīn and Ma'mūn; Gabrieli, F. La Succession.
 4. Tabari: p.653, it is reported that a poet declared that the good king - Harūn - made the worst of decisions in dividing the Caliphate and the Empire.

hardly have been the solution. Moreover Harūn al-Rashīd, as Ibn al-Athīr put it, had not learned from his experience with his brother al-Hādī.¹

The struggle between Amīn and Ma'mūn which had not failed to manifest itself in the days of al-Rashīd became acute soon after his death. Immediately after his accession Amīn showed signs of neglecting his father's will and the pledges which he himself had given in the famous document of the Ka'ba.² The contents of that document were nothing less than giving Ma'mūn full control over Khurāsān and the sole right to settle the succession even to the extent of removing from it his brother Qāsim.³ Ma'mūn and his party in Khurāsān were not at all taken by surprise by Amīn's moves. The struggle between the two brothers started with a war of letters lasting for a period of two years 193-5/808-11 then changed into a military conflict - 195-8/811-13. It ended in the victory of Ma'mūn over Amīn, of Khurāsān over the ruling province of Iraq.

It is clear that the issues involved were not merely the problem of succession but the territorial integrity of

1. Kāmil, VI., p.65.

2. Tabari, pp. 655-60; Mas'ūdi, VI, p.326.

3. Tabari, pp. 658-9, 699; Mas'ūdi, VI, p.328. Curiously enough this presupposed the survival of Amīn by Ma'mūn.

the Abbasid World, the unity of the Abbasid Caliphate and the position of the Abbasid Caliph within those domains. Amīn's attempts to settle those issues, though contrary to his own pledges were but the endeavours of the accepted Caliph to impose his will and that of his ruling province. In this respect it is essential to remember that although the war started two years after Harūn's death the division of the Empire took place almost immediately after it.¹ Ma'mūn was not only the independent ruler of Khurāsān and, according to his father's will, the successor to the Caliphate and the maker of the successor to be, but was in fact acclaimed as Caliph during the life-time of Amīn.² Thus there were two Abbasid Caliphs within the Abbasid domains. Khurāsān was then for the first time since its incorporation within the Islamic Empire, independent under a rival caliph. This period, beginning with its independence from and hostile relations with Iraq and followed by its victory to become the ruling province of the Abbasids for the period in which Ma'mūn's capital was Marw - 198-204/813-20 - was very significant for the future development in that province. Ma'mūn was but the fore-runner of the Tāhirids. His career

1. Tabari, pp. 765-6.

2. " p.1140; Mas'ūdi; VII., p.2.

in Khurāsān confirmed the regional tendencies and possibilities of independence already seen in the time of al-Rashīd in North Africa with the rise of the Aghlabids and in Khurāsān itself where the problems that had faced 'Ali b. 'Isa b. Māhān threatened the position of the Abbasid governors there. The implications of these regional tendencies were not to limit themselves to the political sphere alone. Simultaneously they were to affect the administrative, the financial and cultural fields. Although the centre - Irāq - was later to suffer from these, the rise of regional courts was beneficial to culture and commerce. The concentration of wealth and cultural life in Baghdād was to be superseded by the local retention of wealth and the spread of culture - influenced by the Baghdādī schools through the rising regional centres which, while maintaining unity, gave vent to local variations.¹

Perhaps more important than regionalism was the way in which this Civil War was conducted and the light it throws on the development of society in that period. Though the issues involved were vital their importance seems to have been a question of concern for the ruling circles alone. Beside the regional aspects - in this the material

1. Gibb: An Interpretation., p.39.

benefits which accompanied the fact of being a ruling province or otherwise - which made the Khurāsānis in general support Ma'mūn,¹ and the populace of Baghdād shoulder the burden of its defence against the attack of the armies of Tāhir b. al-Ḥusayn, the war was primarily a dynastic struggle between Amīn and Ma'mūn. Compared to the previous civil wars in Islām there were no religious, ethical and social issues. It was a war of professional soldiers and careerists. Ma'mūn's liberal financial policies in Khurāsān secured for him the support of the population; his regular pay for the armies kept them for his cause. Money also kept loyal the soldiers of Amīn, but the foolishness with which he distributed it bedevilled his cause.² The dominance of this material issue becomes very clear in the opposition of Baghdād to Tāhir's armies. Realising that the power of the city lay in its trading and commercial activities

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1. Ma'mūn's policies in Khurāsān were in contrast to those of 'Alī b. 'Isā b. Māhān under whose governorship a number of uprisings took place, the most important of which was that of Rāfi' b. al-Layth. Ma'mūn catered for the support of such rebels as Rāfi'. The civil war started only after his having settled these problems. Barthold: Turkestan - pp.200-8. Tabari, p.1142, reports that a Syrian Arab addressed Ma'mūn once saying "O Commander of the Believers, be to the Arabs of Syria as you were to the 'Ajam of Khurāsān." Taifūr, kitāb Baghdād, VI, (kawthari), pp.144-5 reports the same story.
 2. Tabari, p.865; M.O. al-Rayas: al-Kharādj, pp.448-51.

more than in its walls and defending troops Tāhir decided to beseige it. During the long siege of the city the burden of defence lay mainly with the population of the city and within these chiefly upon the 'Urāt and 'Ayyārūn.¹ Tabari related that one of these declared that "when we find it easy to live we do not care who becomes Imām."² If Baghdād was to retain its position as capital and hence continue to be the place of the court and the centre of commerce the question of who became Imām was, indeed, beside the point.

It is true that there was no threat of a change of dynasty here. But the causes of this glaring indifference to the matter should not be sought in politics alone. More than there these lay, perhaps, in the economic and social developments of the age. The evidence is that it was an age of relative material ease and worldliness. The flourishing of agriculture, of commerce and trade and of crafts, points to this. So does the rise of new towns and expansions in the already existing ones.³ The

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1. Tabari, pp. 867-908; Masūdi, VI, p.452; Cahen: Mouvement Populaires, pp. 34-6, Duri: Nushū' al-Asnāf, p.143; E.I. s.v. 'Urāt and 'Ayyārūn.
 2. Tabari, p.890.
 3. See X. de Planhol: The Muslim World; al-Fakhri, pp.201-2; Goitein: The Rise; B.Lewis, An Epistle; Duri: op.cit.

abundant description of towns, regions, peoples, trade routes, products and crafts in the literature of the Buldān, in itself an indication of those developments, is yet a further indication not only of the relative affluence but also of the sense of belonging to a large world united despite the differences and variety of its regions. The writing on Kharāj, an important feature of this period shows where the interests of the rulers and the learned circles met on a subject which had become the basis of the relation between the rulers and their subjects.

It is worthy of note that this subject was approached from two different aspects in this period. The administrative is to be seen in Abū Yūsuf's al-kharāj which was more or less a manual of rule according to Islāmic Law written for and at the demand of Harūn al-Rashīd. The religious is to be found in the work by Abū al-Qāsim b. Sallām under the title of Kitāb al-'Amwāl. Ibn Sallām had no connections with the ruling circles. Neither of these works limited its scope to the financial fields but tackled subjects like external relations - specially with the Byzantine World - and the treatment of non-Muslim subjects in the Islamic World. Where the underlying confidence and feeling of satisfaction in the former work had caused the

writer to call the Caliph the shadow of God on earth and influenced al-Rashīd to freeze tacitly the principle of Jihād, reaching thereby a peace treaty with the Byzantine Emperor and exchanging friendly relations with him,¹ the spirit of the latter is in contrast a reminder of that principle and a restatement of the secondary position of the non-Muslims in the Islamic State.² The importance of this difference was to be seen in some of Ma'mūn's policies to be discussed here.

The image of that society, of its habits and the different problems that occupied its attention could be seen in the writings of a contemporary writer like Jāhiz.³ In poetry one find the impact of this prosperity on writers of Arab origin expressed in their acquiring new criteria for things, material, social and intellectual, which had not attracted their predecessors.⁴ Nor were the chronicles of the period devoid of information on that side. The casual references like the one in Ṭabari

1. Vasiliev, I, p.90; Canard: Quelques "A-Côte", p.103.

2. Qudāma b. Ja'far's Kharāj is on the other hand a collection of information on state provincial budgets with geographical and historical information. The juristic aspect comes by chance.

3. For a list of his works see Pellat: Essai D'Inventaire.

4. Cf. Muntaqayāt, pp. 106-7, Abū Tammam, 'Description of Spring'; p.135, Di'bil, 'Pleasure of Living'; pp. 207-11, Buḥturi, 'Description of the Palace of Khosros'.

on the rise of the price of wheat in Baghdād, Baṣra, and Kūfa in the year 207/822-3 is a good indication of the stability of prices on the whole, a fact which is supported by recent research.¹

This development which amongst other things had lain behind the Abbasid Revolution itself, was not threatened, so to speak, by the dynastic struggle in the Civil War save for the narrow regional and personal aspects. Hence the lack of interest of the main body of the community in that affair. With Islamization and Arabization, coupled to benefits from the egalitarian nature of the Islamic society under Abbasid rule, the community was pursuing the basic day-to-day problems of life and giving vent to its other energies in the clashes of cultures and ways of living of which the Mu'tazila and the Shu'ūbiyya were expressions.² These two - leaving aside the part played by some of the Mu'tazila in the Mihna - reflect on the whole a tolerant society, flexible and given to argumentation rather than to rigid and hostile confrontations.

1. Tabari, p.1066. Time and places are significant as the wheat-grainage areas in the north, in Syria and Egypt were at the time disturbed by revolt. These cities in Iraq in the South suffered from a shortage of supply. For prices and salaries cf. E.Ashtor: Essai sur les Prix et les Salaires.

2. For the Shu'ubiyya see Goldziher's views in his M.Studien pp. 147-77, and Gibb's views in his The Social Significance of the Shu'ubiyya.

The application of racial or national criteria¹ to these problems and to the victory of Ma'mūn not only neglect these factors - decisive in my point of view - but also disregard the elements which further Ma'mūn's cause. It is sufficient to mention here that the Khurāsānis who supported Ma'mūn and won his victories were Persians, Arabs, Turks and a mixture of all these groups, that Hijāz,² the heart land of the Arabs, supported Ma'mūn and that the Arab tribe of Khuzā'a also was proud, as Di'bil put it,³ to have been the killers of Amīn.

Ma'mūn's reign proper began 198-218/814-33 with the end of the Civil War. His success over Amīn gave him the opportunity to reunite the Abbasid domains and the Abbasid Caliphate. But it placed on his shoulders the problems of that unification. One of these was the army which with the gradual widening of the gap between the Community and its rulers had become, together with the administrative bodies, the real basis of Abbasid rule. Up to the time of al-Rashīd 193/808, the army

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1. Goldziher: op.cit., p.149; M.H.Ahmad: Al-Khilāfa wa'l-Dawla.
 2. Tabari, p.861. Tabari reports that they supported him because he was unjustly treated - in the religious sense - by Amīn.
 3. Tabari, p.1155; Muntaqayāt, p.121.

of the Abbasid Caliph but also

was not merely the instrument/of the Abbasid cause (Dawla). With the war between Amīn and Ma'mūn, in which that cause was not involved, the situation changed.

The army had been caught up in a war of succession. It became clear during the war that the allegiance of the soldiers was not to the caliph or ruler, not even to the region, but to the direct commander and to good pay.¹ Moreover the veteran soldiers were committed either way in the war so that their ultimate loyalty to the Caliph was doubtful. On the other hand the disinterest in the dynastic dispute showed by the main bulk of the Abbasid subjects emphasized the dependance of the ruler on professional military support.² These factors, aggravated by the many uprisings within the Abbasid Empire and external threats, lay behind the policies which Ma'mūn adopted for the army. This was the incorporation in the army of new elements, who, having been collected mainly from the eastern provinces, were called Turks. But it is essential to distinguish between Turks who came with these new elements and those who had already been in Khurāsān and Transoxamia even

1. Tabari, pp. 782-5.

2. Goitein: A Turning Point, p.122.

before the conquest of the Arabs of those lands. While the latter could be taken as representative of the Islamic World there at that time the former were on the whole new comers to it.¹ This distinction is very clear in Jāhiz's essay on the Turks.² That he compares these to the khawārij is very significant. Here lay their danger, as became apparent in the following reigns. They were hurriedly introduced at a time when the administration was lacking in able men and sound policies. The danger was the more serious as it was the caliph who, in order to guard against regionalism and allegiance to direct commanders, had to rely more and more on these new elements.³ Their threat would in time be directed against the Caliph himself.⁴

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1. C.Cahen: The Turkish Invasion, pp. 135-7; Barthold: Turkestan, pp. 180-203; Frye and Sayili: Turks in Khurāsān and Transoxamia, pp. 180-203.
 2. Jāhiz: Manāqib; also Tabari, p. 1067; Taifūr: Kitāh Baghdād VI, p. 12 (Keller) p. 80 (Kawthari). It is in tune with this change to professional soldiers that the discussions here were about efficiency - not simply loyalty as was in the past (Ibn al-Muqaffa: Ṣahāba).
 3. To eliminate Tāhir b. al-Ḥusayn Ma'mūn had to resort to his being secretly poisoned despite the fact that Tākīr had openly defied Ma'mūn by omitting his name from the khutba. The killing of Harthama b. A'yan by Ma'mūn was the cause of a number of revolts. Tabari, pp. 1042, 1062; Ya'qūbi, Buldān, pp. 90-1, Bala'mi, IV, pp. 504-6, 521.
 4. E.I. s.v. Mutawakkil.

The dependence on the military elements, more precisely the introduction of the Turkish elements into the army, is commonly held as Mu'taṣim's gravest mistake.¹ Yet all the evidence show that the whole change as well as the introduction of the Turks in the army had taken place under Ma'mūn.² From the description of the writers of the period the Turks seem to have been the best elements for the purposes of the Caliph at the time. Jāhiz's essay mentioned above refers to a discussion provoked by a question posed by Ma'mūn to a group of military commanders as to whether they would prefer to meet a hundred Turks or a hundred kharijites in war. They all agreed on the former except for Humaid b. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd who preferred to meet the kharijites. The essay then goes on to enumerate the merits of the Turks as soldiers. Most revealing in connection with the question of loyalty and rule is the passage where Jāhiz says that rule, al-Mulk, needs power which would augment it, add to its stability and splendour and defeat all causes encouraging to coverting it.³ This was more or less the problem confronting Ma'mūn.

1. Khudari: Muḥadrāt: p.241; H.I.Hasan: Tarīkh II, pp. 171-2; cf. Chapter III below.

2. n. 2 page 25 above

3. Manāqib, p.45.

This move away from veteran soldiers is clearer in the high ranks. Here Ma'mūn was looking for men whom he could trust. The way was prepared by eliminating the old commanders. Harthama b. A'yan was killed. Abu al-Sarāyā whom he had left in command of his troops in Irāq defected and was eventually killed too. Tāhir b. al-Ḥusayn who had been given the governorship of khurāsān died in dubious circumstances. In their places there were Mu'taṣim the Caliph's brother and 'Abbās the Caliph's son. There were Afshīn and Maziyar who was a new convert to Islām and who owed personal allegiance to Ma'mūn.¹ It is perhaps not so strange to find that the only survivor of these veteran commanders, 'Ujaif b. 'Anbasa, was to meet the same fate under Mu'taṣim. Yet even more of the men who were to dominate the scene in the reign of Mu'tasim had begun their careers in the days of Ma'mūn. Tabari mentions in this period the names Bugha and Ashinās together with that of Mu'taṣim who is often mentioned with his Turks.² He reports an incident when Mu'taṣim with his Turks met

1. cf. E.M.Wright; Bābak of Baḡdhā; see chapter V below

2. Tabari, p.1067; Tajārīb al-ʿUmam, VI, p.437.

some Kharijite rebels. In the engagement that followed Mu'taṣim was about to receive a mortal wound from one of the Khārijites had it not been for the intervention of one of his Turks who, running to Mu'taṣim's rescue, said in his native tongue marā. It is told that marā meant "know me" and that the person who said it was no less a person than Ashinās the great general of Mu'taṣim.¹ The story could be taken as an illustration of the relation between Mu'taṣim and his Turks, as a tribute to their loyalty and valour, as a projection of the later career of Ashinās or even as a dedication from Tabari to the latter having been his contemporary. But for the student of Abbasid history it illustrates the fact that the advent of the Turks had already begun under Ma'mūn.

If the introduction of new elements in the army by Ma'mūn and in greater numbers by Mu'taṣim, was thus a necessity, their preponderance in state matters later can not be explained without analysing the serious problems which had beset the Abbasid administration in previous reigns. In taking this into consideration,

1. see above, p. 247 n.2; E.I.² s.v. Ashinās.

attention must be drawn to high ranking officials, the wazīrs and those who rose to similar status. The influence of Sassanid traditions together with the support they had from the religious circles gave the Abbasid Caliphs more power than that of the Umayyads.¹ In practice, however, the seclusion of the Caliphs from direct contact with their subjects gave the wazīrs tremendous power in day to day matters as well as in state affairs. This was the case even under caliphs like al-Saffāh and al-Mansūr. The wazīrs were not merely the heads of services but the initiators of policies. In certain cases they seemed to have made their power felt more than that of the caliphs. It was this that made Bashshār b. Burd call upon the Umayyads to arise against al-Mahdi declaring that the caliph was Ya'qūb b. Dāwūd, al-Madi's Wazīr.² The splendour of the Abbasids is always connected with the period of the Barmecides.³ In fact Ibn al-Tiqṭāqā uses the same word Dawla in relation to both Abbasids and Barmecides.⁴ For the former it meant the state or Caliphate, for the latter

1. Gibb, Interpretation, pp. 45-6.

2. Tabari, p. 508.

3. E.I.² s.v. Barāmika.

4. al-Fakhri, pp. 201, 269.

it meant the period of office and influence. Yet even so the use is significant for the suggestions it provokes: because of this the decline of the Caliphate should be traced from there.

Commenting on al-Rashīd, Mas'ūdi relates "his state-affairs deteriorated after the Barmacides; his poor administration and bad policies became obvious to the people."¹ The same opinion is expressed by Jahshiyārī.² It could be asserted that the affairs of the state had in fact depended more on the calibre and devotion of these men, the wazīrs, than they did on those of the caliphs. Yet despite their influence and power, or perhaps because of them,³ the careers of the great wazīrs had ended in disgrace or death or both. This had been so since the time of Abū Salama al-Khallāl whose death under al-Saffāh evoked the cynicism of the poet who declared, "let only him who-so bears malice towards you - or one - be wazīr."⁴ The death of Abū Salama could

1. Tanbīh, p.346.

2. al-Wuzarā' wa'l-Kuttāb, p.265. Jahshiyārī himself belonged to the Kuttāb class and might have had his reasons for saying this. Mas'ūdi was not of the kuttāb. The opinion expressed is thus not lacking in support.

3. Ibn Qutaiba, 'Uyūn al-Akhbār, I, p.45

4. Ṭabari, p. 60.

perhaps be explained by the necessities of the revolution or as a result of his alleged pro-'Alid tendencies when the Abbasids had yet to make good their claim for power. All the same the prophecy of the poet was fulfilled in the fates of Ya'qūb b. Dawūd, the Barmecides, al-Faḍl b. Sahl and others.¹ In each case there were the court intrigues, the struggle for power by those who were possible alternatives to those already in office and the fear of the caliphs from their too efficient and powerful wazīrs. But this was all to the detriment of the administration. It suffered from the loss of able men and the interference of incompetent caliphs like al-Rashīd. Invariably there was the change from the able to the mediocre as was the case in replacing Yahya b. Khālīd by al-Faḍl b. al-Rabī'. The change of men was followed by changes of policies and power groupings. It had its effects on administrative efficiency, and on the unity and general cohesion of the state. These problems became clear after the fall of the Barmecides whose disappearance marked the end of good and unified administration in the Abbasid state. Their success was

1. see D. Sourdél, Le Visirat Abbaside, I & II.

due to their ability, their loyalty and devotion to the Abbasid family. It had also been due to the fact that they were a family which had almost all the administration under its control. The members of the Barmecide family were loyal to one another, to the Abbasid state in general and to the caliph in particular. In the name of the latter two they attained power and glory. This aspect of the family is very important. Again and again it played an important part in the unity of the empire, the unity of its administration and in the fates of Caliphs and minor dynasties. Up to this period one sees this with the careers of the Barmecides, the Sahlis, and the Tahirids. Later it will be seen with the Sāmānids, the Saffārids and the Buyids. (On a different plane it was to be so with the Seljuqs and the Ottomans.) Sourdrel points out that Faḍl b. al-Rabī' could not alone¹ replace the family of the Barmecides. Jahshyārī indicates the negligence of provincial matters in Baghdād under al-Rashīd following the fall of the Barmecides.²

In the post-al-Rashīd period the problem was aggravated by the growth and consolidation of factions during the

1. Le Visirat Abbaside, I, pp. 183-4.

2. al-Wuzara', p.265.

period of the Civil War. The war brought the underlying differences to the fore as it was also a war between the party of Faḍl b. Rabī' under Amīn and that of Faḍl b. Sahl under Ma'mūn. More important was the fact that they were virtually two independent administrations fighting each other. It was a period of an independent regional government in Khurāsān. A precedent was set for later times. The end of the war did not bring with it a return to the earlier situation. The central government never did regain that position. The same reasons which made Ma'mūn look for new elements in the army made him do the same in the administration. His mistrust of the Khurāsānī elements is revealed by the fact that his move to Irāq was accompanied by a search for new men.¹ It is also revealed by his statement in a discussion with Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn, reported by Ṭabari, that the Khurasinis looked after each others' interests.²

The unity and efficiency of the administration seen with the Barmecides did not continue after them. The only hope was that the Sahl's who had been their protégés and trained under them, would carry on.³ But the

1. Le Visiérat Abbaside, I, p.240.

2. p.1042, Taifur, kitab Baghdād, VI, (kawthari), pp. 18-9.

3. al-Fakhri, p.304.

same fate that befell Ma'mūn's veteran commanders befell his veteran administrators. Faḍl b. Sahl, Faḍl b. al-Rabī', Ḥasān b. Sahl, 'Alī b. 'Īsā b. Māhān and Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn, all died in the period of Ma'mūn, some of them through his connivance. Thus in all respects it was a period of new men with new ideals. Ma'mūn's dilemma is best reflected in the fact that he used so many persons for the office of chief kātib without getting any one to fill in the gap left by the death of Faḍl b. Sahl.¹ On the death of Faḍl b. Sahl Ma'mūn offered the post of wazīr to Aḥmad b. Abi Du'ād but the latter refused saying that he had not known of any one who had had that office and a safe life.²

Al-Ṣūlī relates the story of the quick and frequent change of secretaries in a very telling way. "The duration of the office, once a life-time, came to be a year, a month, a day and finally an hour" commented Ṣūlī's informer.³

It should be remembered that the bureaucracy as such did not suffer. On the contrary it was growing into a distinct class of professional clerks (kuttāb) who had

1. al-Fakhri, p.304; Mas'ūdi: Tanbīh, p.352, also see D. Sourdel, op.cit.
2. Tanūkhī: Nishwar, '8', p.29; A.Amīn: Ḍuḥā, p.135.
3. Adab al-Kuttāb, pp. 185-6.

their distinguishing attire, their own training and literature, all with a marked esprit de corps.¹

State service in the army and administration had thus become an open field for career-seekers. The statesman administrator of the past was greatly missed. In the beginning when there were great and influential wazīrs one finds most of Ibn al-Muqaffa's writings, especially his Kitāb al-Ṣaḥāba, all dealing with statecraft.² Later when the state service became a profession for earning a living the literature produced was mainly for satisfying the requirements of the routine of the different Dīwāns.³ By far the best illustration of this development is Jahiz's treatise, where their (the kuttāb's) education, their dress and their manners and attitudes are very ably described.⁴

These problems of regionalism, of the army and of

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1. Jahshīyārī: al-Wuzarā', pp. 3, 126, 166; Jāhiz, D., Dhamm Akhlāq al-Kuttāb; Gibb, The Social Significance, pp. 106-7; D.Sourdel; Jahshiyari, pp.288-9; Tanukhi: al-Faraj, p.100. They also used to have Thursdays as free shopping days. This practice was stopped under Mu'taṣim. Jahshiyārī, op.cit., p.166.
 2. Goitein, A Turning Point, pp. 120-9, M.Kurd 'Ali: Rasāil, pp. 117-34.
 3. See al-ṣūlī, Adab al-Kuttāb, Ibn al-'Abbār, I'Tāb al-Kuttāb, Jahshīyārī, al-Wuzarā' w'al-Kuttāb, Khwarazmi, Mafātiḥ al-'Ulūm, Ibn Abd Rabbih, al-I'qd, II.
 4. Dhamm Akhlāq al-Kuttāb, also his Madh at-Tujjār wa-Dhamm 'Amal al-Sultān.

it also shows the growing awareness of Ma'mūn of the real problem of the Caliphate. The second policy was the attempt at the creation of a state dogma and its propagation by persuasion, sanctions, and sometimes force. Coupled with the second policy was the third, which was the renewal of the war against Byzantium.

The first of these policies has been the subject of a number of studies.¹ But in these it is either limited to the relations between Ma'mūn and the 'Alids or explained on the assumed grouping of Arabs versus Persians. Duri in particular treats it as such. His conclusions, though not very clear, are based on the acceptance of the idea that the whole move was a result of the workings of al-Faḍl b. Sahl whose main move was the retention of power by the Persian elements in the Caliphate. In selecting his evidence to prove this idea, he overlooks the fact that the sources he used were mainly Iraqī sources or influenced by such sources. As such these represent an Abbasid point of view. In Duri's work there is no mention of Ma'mūn's religious policy or an appreciation of his other policies in

1. F.Gabrieli, Ma'mūn e gli 'Alidi; Duri, 'A. 'A. 'A. pp. 202-10; A.Chejne, Succession to the Rule in Islām, M.H.M.Ahmad, al-Khilāfā w'al-Dawla.

relation to the question of succession. It is because of the fact that those approaches were not all embracing or convincing that one is forced to look for other explanations. The choice by Ma'mūn of 'Alī b. Musā al-Riḍā¹ for the succession could be taken not so much as a strictly pro-'Alid policy as a pro-Hāshimite one, designed to rally to the state all the elements which in defeating the Umayyads had brought the Abbasids in power.² Nothing could be more reminiscent of the whole anti-Umayyad movement than the name al-Riḍā which Ma'mūn had deliberately chosen for Alī b. Musā. In full the name was al-Riḍā min ahl al-Bayt - the accepted one from amongst the house of the Prophet - which had been the rallying point for the anti-Umayyads before the declaration of the Abbasid first Caliph al-Saffāh.³ Not only had the civil war been a war of succession; its end was followed by a series of 'Alid risings.⁴ Ma'mūn must have been partly responding to these in his first choice

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1. Tabari, p.1013; Tajārīb, VI, p.436, Qalqashandī: Subh, IX, pp.362-6, Bal'ami, IV, pp.508-10, E.I.(2) s.v. 'Alī b. Musā ar-Riḍā.
 2. It is significant that Ibn Khaldūn calls the Abbasid State a Shi'ite State. cf. Ibar, III, pp.170-3.
 3. E.I.(2) s.v. Abbasids & 'Alids; Duri, 'A.'A.'A., pp.18-40.
 4. Tabari, events of the years 198-204; also Bal'ami, IV, same years. In p.507, Bal'ami reports that Faḍl b. Sahl told Ma'mūn that all the uprisings were caused by the 'Alids and their supporters.

of a successor. But Ma'mūn's relations with the 'Alids were not merely a question of policy. His pro-'Alid feelings seem to have been very genuine.¹ He maintained good relations with the Alids throughout his reign and advised his ultimate successor Mu'taṣim to do the same.² Thus if the pro-'Alid policy of succession was the mark of the Marw period the fact that Ma'mūn had been consistently pro-'Alid - irrespective of the succession - should not be ignored. Nor ought it to be ignored that Khurāsān was the real centre of the anti-Umayyad, pro-Hāshimite feelings and allegiances.³ In his policies and speeches in Khurāsān at the time of the Civil War Ma'mūn was hitting upon the problems which had in the first place roused Khurāsān against the Umayyads.⁴

Ma'mūn must have seen that while the 'Abbasids had come to power in the name of Ahl-al-Bayt, they had in fact maintained their position by their bureaucracy, their armies and the religious colour which they gave to their

1. Ṭabari, p.1102, Kāmil, VI, pp. 309-10.

2. " , p.1139.

3. In this it was perhaps more pro-'Alid than Abbasid. The frustration of the 'Alids in Irāq must have driven them to Khurāsān as it did to North Africa. Also the frustrations of some of the Khurāsānis after the fate of Abu Muslim must have made them susceptible to 'Alid propaganda. See Ibn Isfaniyār, History of Ṭabaristān and al-Qummi, Tarikhi Qum. Even in Irāq itself Ma'mūn relied on pro-'Alid supporters in his fight against Amīn. Di'bil's poetry makes this clear and illustrates some of the pro-'Alid feelings of the time. See his Dīwān or Bustāni's, Muntaqayāt, pp. 120-3.

4. Ṭabari, pp. 774, 796.

rule through the good relations which they maintained with the 'Ulamā' class.¹ He must have seen too that not only did their political rivals in the claim to Ahl al-Bayt develop into a religious sect but that even the Umayyāds had at the time some following, as there was talk of the īmamate of Mu'awiya.² It was this surge of pro-Umayyad feelings which made Ma'mūn proclaim against Mu'awiya and threaten all those who spoke in his favour with severe punishment.³ All these factors with the Civil War in the background and other developments in his reign must have awakened Ma'mūn to his precarious dependence upon the bureaucracy and professional armies and made him search for a more solid and lasting basis for the Caliphate.

The pro-'Alid policy of succession failed. It clashed with the very powerful allegiances which the Abbasids had already established. Abbasids and pro-Abbasids elements had naturally seen it as a preference for the 'Alids to themselves. Feeling that the realisation of this would rob them of their vested interests

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1. A.Amīn: Duhā, I, p.374; Gibb: An Interpretation, p.45
 2. see Jāhiz, Nābita; Pellat, Le Culte de Mu'a wiya wiya, pp.53-67; H.Zayyāt, at-Tashayyuf li Mu'awiya.
 3. Tabari, p.1098; Mas'ūdi, VII, pp. 90,93; Taifūr: kitāb Baghdād, VI, (kawtharī) pp. 45-6, 54.

they stood against the move to the extent of putting up a rival caliph in the person of Ma'mūn's uncle, Ibrahīm b. al-Mahdī.¹ Although Mas'ūdi reports that Ma'mūn had made a census of the members of the Abbasid family in the year 200/815-6 and found them to number 33000 persons, the caliph seemed nevertheless to have misunderstood their power and influence.² It is essential here to remember that the real opposition to the move centred around Baghdād and the Baghdādīs. Besides being the centre of Abbasid power Baghdād saw in the move the possibility of the final transfer of the capital to Marw where Ma'mūn was at the time.³ The climate of religious opinion was, moreover, influenced by the 'Ulamā', whose power and influence were much enhanced by the Abbasid Caliphs. Their interests and teachings were against Ma'mūn's policy which might have, had it succeeded, fostered Shī'ī interests in all fields.

The opposition of Baghdād made the dangers of the attempted change of the ruling dynasty and the possibility

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1. Tabari, p.1013, and events of the years 201-4; Mas'ūdi, VII, pp. 60-1; Bala'mi IV, pp. 510-5.
 2. Mas'ūdi, VII, p.59. Probably that was the number of the Abbasids and not the Abbasids; such a big number must have included the descendants of al-'Abbas and their clients.
 3. See page 19 above, for the position of the Abbasids in Baghdād see Ya'qūbi: Buldān, p.4.

of the change of the Abbasid capital very clear to Ma'mūn. The result was that he had to abandon both. The death of 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā in 203/318-9 relieved him of the former problem. The problems in Irāq with a rival caliph made him hasten to Baghdād, which, besides being the real centre of Abbasid power, was certainly a better capital than Marw, so far away from the centre of Abbasid domains. What is important to remember is that Ma'mūn did not nominate a successor after the death of 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā. A nomination was made almost at the last possible moment when it was imperative for him to name a successor. Moreover it was made not so much in the interest of his family as in that of the State.¹

Thus Ma'mūn's policy of a succession designed to rally to the Caliph and the Caliphate as the central institution of government for the Islamic community, the necessary support failed. It had indeed made the position of the Caliph more precarious, owing to the antagonism which it had provoked. One notes that Ma'mūn died without even succeeding in rallying to him the bulk of the Abbasids, as his remarks in his last

1. See Chapter II, below.

days show.¹ Nor was he to win over the other elements antagonized by that policy, especially the 'Ulamā' class with the influence they held upon the people. In point of fact his second policy, the Mihna, was to alienate these even more. Hence the question as to why he should do so if it were not for his awareness that the Caliphate was 'emptied of its meaning'.²

The word Mihna is derived from the verb mahana, which means to test, to smooth, to purify, to scourge or to force one to confess to something which one did not do or did not believe in.³ Applied to the religious policy initiated by Ma'mūn and ended by Mutawakkil the Mihna meant all these things. Because of the two latter connotations it was described as bid'a (sinful innovation).⁴

The problem upon which the inquisition centred was the doctrine of the creation of the Qur'ān. This in itself was a corollary to one of the Mu'tazila five principles,⁵ which, based on the transcendental nature

1. Tabari, pp. 1139.

2. Gibb: Government and Islām, p.120.

3. Lisān s.v. m h n.

4. Ibid., this was of course a late addition to the meaning of the word Mihna reflecting Hanbalite attitudes.

5. E.I.(1), s.v. Mu'tazila.

of God, held that God's attributes were nothing but God himself.¹ All things except God were created and therefore not eternal. Thus was the Qurān. For the Mu'tazila, to define God's attributes as something other than God or to elevate any of God's creation to the level of being coeval with God was heresy. It was tashbīh (anthropomorphism) as they called it. To call the Qurān eternal, to call it the uncreated word of God, was to subscribe to something analogous to Christian beliefs as well.² (Jesus, the word of God, was eternal.) The principle of propagating the true faith or of correcting wrong beliefs was held to be the duty of every Muslim and the more so of the Caliph by virtue of his position and the means at his disposal. This was common to all the different schools of Muslims. But neither the Caliph nor any instituted body had been given the right or claimed to have the right to determine what true faith was let alone force people to accept it.³

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1. al-Khayyāt: Kitāb al-Intiṣār, pp. 13-4; al-Ash'a'rī: Maqalāt, pp. 169-70; al-Shahrastāni: al-Milāl, p.28; Mas'ūdī, VI, pp. 20-1, Ibn al-Murtada: Tabaqāt, p.2., Z.H.Jar Allah: al-Mu'tazila, pp. 27-8, A.Amin: Fajr, I, p.343, Tritton: Muslim Theology, p.79.
 2. Tabari, p.1118; Becker: Islam Studien, pp. 442-3.
 3. Some of the Shi'a such as the Isma'ilis did, cf., B.Lewis, Origin of Isma'ilism.

Moreover the principle of the creation of the Qur'ān ran contrary to the accepted belief of by far the greater number of the Muslims, learned and lay alike. These had so far faithfully followed the traditional school of learning, which embraced the majority of the 'Ulamā' class.¹ For them, to declare that the Qur'ān was created was in effect to limit the validity of its message.

Like the rest of other Muslim religious schools the Mu'tazila based their teachings on the Qur'ān and the Tradition,² in which they were very well versed. But unlike them they were not an inward looking group - they did not seek their proofs from within the Qur'ān and Tradition. They had knowledge of Biblical and Persian religions. What is more they were amongst the first Muslims to learn, use and spread Greek philosophy and its system of logic. Here lay their pride and boast because they claimed that they alone held their belief not simply on Naqḷ - Transmission - but also on

1. E.I. (2) cf., Aḥl al-Ḥadīth.

2. To the Tradition the Mu'tazila applied scholastic reasoningⁱⁿ accepting or rejecting it. It is to be remembered that the Traditionist had already started the application of the reliability or otherwise of the Isnād - chain of transmitters - in accepting or rejecting Traditions. This was in itself a step towards the application of scholastic reasoning which the Mu'tazila used.

the rational use of Kalām.¹ And by doing so they put the case of Islām in the same way as their opponents in other religions were putting their own. It does look as if the development which led to the formalization of dogma by the Mu'tazila was to a great extent a response to challenges from other religions, and not to other Muslim schools. In this the nature of disputes, the argumentations, and the then current religious polemics show that it was more in reaction to Christianity than to any other religion.² While Islām had won its way against the Persian dualistic religions and the Sassanid empire, the Christian world - Byzantium - was still the arch enemy of the Caliphate. Within the Caliphate Christians, through whom amongst other things Biblical knowledge, Greek philosophy and theological thinking found their way into Islām, prospered and were challenging the cause of Islām. They held quite influential places in the administration and society as secretaries, clerks and physicians.³

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1. Jāhiz, Nafyyal-Tashbīh, p.285; al-Khayyāt, Kitāb al-Intisār, p.15; cf. Anawati and Gardet: Introduction à la Théologie, pp. 46-52.
 2. Jāhiz: Risāla fi al-Radd 'Ala al-Nasārā, pp.17-19.
 3. Ibid.

In formalizing their dogma and arguing their case against Christianity the Mu'tazila appear unconsciously to have been carrying on the religious struggle which Zoroastrianism had been fighting against the same religion under the Sassanids at a time when the influence of the Biblical religions and Greek philosophy threatened the unity of their state.¹ The Caliphate had inherited the position of the Sassanids vis-à-vis Byzantium in the military and political spheres. It is also interesting to note that it was Abd Allah. b. al Mu'qaffa', who, before the Mu'tazila, had proposed to al-Manṣūr to write something like a catechism for the Khurāsāni soldiers² and that the Sassanids had resorted to something like the Mihna when religious differences amongst their subjects threatened the basis and power of their rule.³ The principle of al-manzila bayn al-manzilatayn, the state between the two states, which sparked off the rise of the Mu'tazila is in a way reminiscent of the doctrine of the golden mean of the Zoroastrians despite the differences in application and the purely Muslim argumentations put forth for the former.

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1. Zaehner: Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism, pp.177-8.
 2. M.K.Ali: Rasa'il, pp.117-134; D.S.Goitein: A Turning Point, p.123.
 3. Zaehner, Dawn and Twilight, p.186.

Other things which one notes in relation to these two groups are the stress on reason - a reasoned faith - , the intolerance towards sin - evil uncompromisingly abhorred - and the attitude to worldly life common to both despite their extreme puritanism.¹ But these are only analogies at once tempting and difficult to substantiate.²

What is certain, however, is that in inciting Aḥmad b. Abi Du'ād to carry on with the Mihna, Jaḥiz constantly reminded him of the time when their opponents used every means they could to stifle Mu'tazilite views.³ Thus the view that the Mu'tazalite theology represented the official theology of the Abbasid movement⁴ is not only challenged by the views that show where the religious backing of the movement lay, but also by Jaḥiz's reference to former persecution of the Mu'tazila. Moreover the Mu'tazila were not all agreed on political affiliations. While the principle Imamate does not appear amongst their principles the whole tone of their teaching show that they regarded it as a means and not an

1. Ibid., pp. 289-91.

2. Gibb suggests that the Mu'tazilite school could have been a response to the challenge from the Shu'ūbiyya literature. Gibb: The Social Significance, p.112; idem: Interpretation: pp.46-7.

3. Nafyyat-Tashbīh p.285.

4. Shorter E.I. s.v. Mu'tazila. Tritten does not accept this view and points out that the Mu'tazila were called the Umawiyya sometimes, Muslim Theology, pp.60-1.

obligation. It is enough to remember that for them even prophecy itself was not necessary as man was by nature good and hence capable of knowing right from wrong.

It is equally difficult to accept the view that the Mu'tazila were of political origin.¹ Because of their attitude to the Caliphate and because of the development which brought them into being it is more reasonable to see them as a school of thought springing up from the strictly religious school of Traditionists which they so vigorously came to oppose. True that their du'āt (agents) were very active in Khurāsān spreading Islām and anti-Umayyād propaganda which served the Abbasid cause. But it is to be remembered that that propaganda was not so much pro-Abbasid as it was pro-Ahl al-Bayt; for the Mu'tazila it was for the just rule irrespective of who the Caliph was to be. Ma'mūn whose reign marked the advent of the Mu'tazila was himself pro-Ahl al-Bayt and not exclusively pro-Abbasid. It is also clear that the Mu'tazila held the principle of Qadar, Free Will, upon which they based their extreme attitude

1. E.I. (1) s.v. Mu'tazila.

to sinners (and hence the Justice of God in punishing them) and which had great influence in the revolts in Islām. But so did the Zaidite Shī'a or the ^{others} Jahmiyya who ^{like the} Mushabbiha (anthropomorphists) were regarded as heretics by the Mu'tazila.

The emergence of the Mu'tazila was not the outcome of political circumstance but the result of religious discussions and disputes. But their rise to power under Ma'mūn and then under Mu'taṣim and Wāthiq was political. Ma'mūn declared his belief in the principle of the creation of the Qur'ān in the 212/227-8, the year in which he proclaimed the cursing of Mu'āwiyā. But it was only in the year 218/833, the year of his death, that he tried to force that doctrine upon the 'Ulamā' and through them upon all Muslims. That policy came at a time when Ma'mūn was facing serious troubles in Egypt and unleashing vigorous campaigns against Byzantium. Why should Ma'mūn pursue such a policy at such a time? Why did he choose a corollary rather than a major principle of the Mu'tazilites for the Mihna? Why did he direct the operation against a certain group of 'Ulamā' and not all the Muslims? Was it a purely religious issue or a political one in religious guise? Ma'mūn could

have been a convinced Mu'tazilite but one notes that it had taken him six years to reach the extreme position of using force to impose his doctrine. The outcome of that policy, had it succeeded, would not have only been the correction of wrong belief but also the wresting of the State of the religious leadership of the community. In fact it would have meant the discrediting of the class of the Traditionists who had so far expressed that aspect - of religious leadership - on behalf of the community. There was in fact no religious crisis in Islām. There was a political crisis in the Caliphate and Ma'mūn chose to solve it through the only possible and effective way in a Muslim community - religion.¹ He wanted to add to the office of Caliph the prestige of the 'Ulamā' class. This may perhaps explain the choice of the problem of the creation of the Qur'ān. Difficult as it was to popular understanding it was the best to choose from amongst the Mu'tazilite principles and by relating to Christianity rally popular support. There was also the possibility of arguing for it from within

1. Gibb, See his "Interpretation" and his Government and Islām.

the Qur'ān itself.¹ Because of its connection with Christianity one can see its relation to the Byzantium campaigns and Ma'mūn's refusal to accept a peace treaty with Byzantium.²

The Mu'tazila themselves were not united in their attitude towards the use of power in the propagation of their ideas or towards being involved in the services of the State, an attitude which was also common to some amongst the Traditionists. The first Mu'tazilites, noted for their piety, had refrained from both.³ Some of these near to Ma'mūn had actually opposed the use of compulsion advising that it was bad politics to do so - a fact which may add to the supposition that the key to the Mihna was politics. It was only those like Ahmad b. Abi Du'ād⁴ and Jāhiz who were parties to advocating and practising the use of force under Ma'mūn as well as later.

From what one perceives in Jāhiz's writings, the causes behind the attitude seem to have been a mixture of religious zeal, vindictiveness, love of power and added to this a certain amount of free-lancing in writing

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1. Tabari, p.1112; Jāhiz; Nabita, p.121.
 2. " p.1109, Tabari reports some of the terms offered by the Byzantium Emperor; Vasiliev, "Byzance et les Arabes", I, pp.122-3.
 3. al-Shahrastāni: al-Milal, p.34; cf. al-Murtaḍā: Tabagāt
 4. E.I.(2) s.v. Ahmad b. Abi Du'ād.

on Jāhiz's own part.¹ It is important to remember that the nature of the miracle of the Qur'ān - its inimitability - had been a topic of great discussion at the time. The Mu'tazila themselves held different views on this. But it was one of their great leaders al-Nazzām, who advocated that its miracle lay in what it contained of prophecy, that as far as its 'composition' (Ta'liḥ) and form (Naẓm) were concerned these might have been within the power of human beings, but for the fact that God had forbidden them from that (mana'ahum).² From this arose the theory of the Ṣarfa (distracting of the attention) to which Jāhiz had subscribed. These ideas could not but have been related to the question of the creation of the Qur'ān. The whole problem can be regarded in reference to the Muslim-Christian disputes on the validity and truth of their respective religions.

Mu'taṣim, neither a mu'tazilite nor a policy-maker, carried on with the Mihna on the advice of his brother Ma'mūn and the pressure of Aḥmād b. Abī Du'ād, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Malik al-Zayyāt and others, all of whom Mu'taṣim

1. See his Nābita or his Nafy al-Tashbīh. Here he is more the political propagandist than the religious leader.

2. al-Ash'ari: Maḡālāt, p.225.

had inherited from the entourage of Ma'mūn.¹ Of those subjected to the Inquisition the most important personality was Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, whose unyielding stand in the face of intimidation and physical hardship confirmed the ascendancy of the 'Ulamā class and their undisputed prerogative in matters of religion. Questioned, imprisoned, chained and threatened with death unless he accepted the doctrine of the creation of the Qur'ān, he was saved only by the death of Ma'mūn who could, perhaps, have afforded to go so far. Under Mu'tasim Ibn Ḥanbal became the centre of the issue. It looks as though the success or failure of the Inquisition was seen to depend on the stand that Aḥmad would make, a feeling common to both persecutor and persecuted.² From the time of his arrest and imprisonment under Ma'mūn, and his showing no sign of giving way despite the hardships which he faced and despite the fact that a good number of others had in one way or another given way, Aḥmad became a popular hero. The Inquisition was conducted at

1. Ya'qūbi, Tarīkh, p.204, reports that Aḥmad b. Abī Du'ād was very influential with Mu'tasim. Mas'ūdī, Tanbīh, p.356 says that Mu'tasim followed the school of al-Ḥaṣan al-Baṣrī in religious matters - a curious thing for someone who applied the Mihna, cf., n.4 p. below. Suyūṭī, p.133, reports that Mu'tasim ordered teachers to include the doctrine of the Creation of the Qur'ān when instructing children. cf. E.M., p.XVII.
2. Ibn Kathīr: al-Bidāya, X, p.334, Abu Nu'aim, Hilyat al-Awliya' pp.197-206. Ibn Kathīr reports that Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm said to Mu'tasim that it was not wise to free Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal for that would mean his victory over two Caliphs. Both are Ḥanbalite sources.

the court in Bagh^hdād in the presence of the Caliph, the notables and the guards. The questioning was done by Ibn Abi Du'ād and Ibn al-Zayyāt with the occasional participation of others.¹ Mu'tasim himself took no part, - that was beyond him - although he had some share in the scourging of Aḥmad.² It lasted for three days. With great courage and resignation to martyrdom for his belief, Aḥmad faced the questioning, the humiliation and the scourging which nearly killed him and did leave him with permanent bodily injuries.³ He would not recant nor be persuaded by rational or theological arguments but stuck firmly to the letter of the Tradition without even attempting to interpret its meaning or implication.⁴ Meanwhile public interest in the proceedings of the Inquisition was gathering momentum. Aḥmad's stand became the subject of admiration and popular sympathy was soon translated into an open attempt to use force for his deliverance.⁵ Even in the court itself some of the

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1. Abū Nu'aim, op.cit., pp. 198-206, see Patton: The Mihna, pp. 147-50.
 2. Abū Nu'aim, op.cit., p. 206.
 3. Ibn Kathīr: op.cit., p. 335.
 4. ibid.; Only Ya'qūbi reports that Aḥmad declared that he would profess the Caliphs doctrine including the creation of the Qu'rān. Tarikh, p. 158.
 5. Abū Nu'aim, Hilyat, pp. 204-6.

army men were showing their sympathies with him while the Turks - the most trusted of Mu'tasim's troops - never learned what it was all about.

The instrument which had been designed to save the day for the Caliphate was gradually turning against it. Mu'tasim, never convinced or interested in the affair, could not go on with the popular threat before his gates. He abandoned it.¹ Ahmad was spared. In order to still the people who gathered outside armed and angry in hearing that Ahmad's life was at stake, Mu'tasim had to produce him - well dressed to disguise his wounds and sufferings - to the crowds. That was the climax of the Mihna but not its end. Although it was continued under Wathiq it seems to have been overlooked in the remaining years of Mu'tasim.²

Having begun his policy of religious persecution³ simultaneously with the attempt at a new wave of conquest

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1. Both Abū Nu'aim and Ibn Kathīr report that Mu'tasim expressed his intention to give up the Inquisition and declaring to Ahmad b. Hanbal that it was only because it had been started by Ma'mūn that Ahmad was being subjected to the Inquisition. cf. Ibn al-Muntada: Tabagāt, pp.123-5.
 2. Tabari mentions nothing on the Mihna in his account of the reign of Mu'tasim. On the contrary he reports that the Fuqahā', including Ahmad b. Hanbal - who had been subjected to punishment on that question were released on the news of the death of Ma'mūn. He does not say by whom they were released. Tabari, pp.1115-6, cf. E.M. p.XVI.
 3. Persecution was not new - cf. E.I.(1) Zandaqa.

in Byzantium¹ - the third policy, the aim of which was the revival of the principle of Jihād, and through that to rally the support of the community of the Caliphate - Ma'mūn was soon to die in camp on the Syro-Byzantine borders in the Badrūn-Podenus river in the year 218. He was struck by malaria which brought a quick death but left him time to nominate Mu'tasim as successor and dictate his will on him. As will be seen in the following chapter this move showed much insight on his part in the affairs and problems of the Abbasid State. More than anything it reveals the onerous legacy which he left for his successor and explains the continuity of his policies in Mu'tasim's reign.

1. It is worthy of note that Ma'mūn sent for Ahmad b. Hanbal and others to persecute them while he was in frontier campaigns against Byzantium. Tabari, pp. 1115-6.

CHAPTER II

Early Life and Accession of Mu'tasim

It is difficult to ascertain the date of the birth of Mu'tasim the eighth Abbasid Caliph. The sources differ not only on the day and the month but also on the year. It is perhaps not so difficult to know why. The birth of Mu'tasim unlike those of his brothers Amin, Ma'mūn and even al-Qāsim, was not of such importance as to deserve the attention of those who were interested in the births of the caliphs and the caliphs-to-be. It was sufficient that Mu'tasim's name got mentioned amongst the many others of his brothers and sisters, the sons and daughters of Hanūn al-Rashīd. By the time he became of such importance as to deserve the mention of the date of his birth by chroniclers and the like - when he became caliph or more likely on or after his death - the time of his birth was far behind and difficult to be certain about. So there were the differences in the sources. But the differences are neither great nor - as far as one can see - important. Mu'tasim was born in al-Khulā - Baghdād - in the eighth or ninth month of the year 178, 179 or 180 / 794, 795 or 796¹. Called

1. Tabari, pp. 1323-4; E.M., p.127; Mas'ūdi, VII p.144; Ibn Kathīr: al-Bidāya, X, p.295. The differences can be seen in sources which mentioned his age such as: Mas'ūdi: Tanbīh p.353; Ya'qūbī, III, p.254; Dīnawarī: Akhbar p.401.

al-Mu'taṣim bi-Allah, his name was Muḥammad, his kunya Abu Ishāq.

The same difficulty arises with regard to the origin of Mu'taṣim's mother. Somehow it appears to have been accepted to be Turkish. It has even been taken by certain writers to explain Mu'taṣim's relations with the Turks. Because his mother was a Turk he came to know and like the Turks, collected numbers of them - so the argument goes - and gave them positions of power and influence.¹ For this he is - alone - held responsible for the influence which the Turks had in the destinies of the caliphs and the caliphate.² But there is no evidence to support such a claim for the origin of the mother of Mu'taṣim. All the sources agree that his mother was not of Arab origin. No source mentions that she was a Turk. In fact her origin as far as race or nationality are concerned is not mentioned at all. The nearest thing to that is that she was of Soghdian³ origin. It is certain that in Soghd as well as in many other parts of the 'Abbāsid empire there were Turks. But one is justified in doubting, even in rejecting, the notion of

1. H.I. Hasan: Ta'rikh, II, pp.171/2; Khudari: Muḥadarāt, p.241; Dūri: 'A. 'A.A., p.228; N. Asīl: Madīnat al-Mu'taṣim, p.162.

2. Khudari: Muḥadarāt. p.214.

3. The description "Soghdian" could be ethnic and hence mean Iranian or could be territorial and difficult to ascertain on ethnic grounds. But since she was born in Kufa it is likely that the term was used to mean Iranian. See p.60.

Mu'tasim's mother being a Turk on the ground that the sources do not say so. Had she been so their authors would have mentioned it because they mentioned constantly Mu'tasim and his Turks and were aware of their significance in Abbasid history. Tabari mentions in a very cautious way that Mu'tasim's mother was Soghdian.¹ Later, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥashimi² who was interested in tracing the origins of the mothers of the Caliphs who were ummahāt awlād³ includes Mu'tasim's mother but does not give her origin. For these as well as for the rest of the sources Mu'tasim's mother was a slave girl (muwallada) from Kufa. Her name was Marida.⁴ This much is certain and is significant for even if she was originally a Turk she must have been of the Turks who settled in Soghd and were thus far removed from the nomadic elements who were the sources of Mu'tasim's Turks.⁵ Moreover not only was she born and bred in Kūfa

1. Tabari, p.1329; E.M., p.132.

2. al-Muḥabbar, p.45.

3. E.I., s.v. Umm walad; E.I.(2) s.v. 'Abd.

4. Tabari; p.1329; E.M., p.132; Ya'qūbi: III p.197; Mas'ūdi: Tanbīh: p.352; idem, VII, p.103.

5. E.I., s.v. Soghd, Yaqūt: Buldan, III, pp.94-5, Frye and Ayidīn: Turks in the M.E., pp.198-201; see also Jāhiz: Manāqib.

but her father too had grown up in the Sāwād.¹ Thus the explanation of Mu'taṣim's acquisition of the Turks for his army by attributing it to his mother's supposed origin is as unfounded as it is unconvincing. Is it possible that a person like Jāḥiz who knew Mu'taṣim so well and who wrote a treatise on the "Attributes of the Turks" would refrain from mentioning the origin of Mu'taṣim's mother had she been a Turk? Would that not have been a valid cause of praise, knowing that the nobleness of the birth of the mother's was no longer as important with the Abbasid Caliphs as it was with the Umayyads? Mu'taṣim's mother was very likely not a Turk. She was probably of Iranian origin as she was described as Soghdian when she was in Irāq. The obscurity of her origin like the uncertainty of the date of the birth of her son show their relation to the court life and the affairs of the state. At the time of Harūn al-Rashīd she was simply one of his wives as Mu'taṣim was simply one of his sons, neither with a claim upon the Caliphate. Harūn al-Rashīd already had three sons who were duly nominated for the succession.

1. Tabari: p.1329; E.M., p.132; E.I. s.v. Sawād, see Dūri: Eco. Life of Mesopotamia also. Masūdi gives his name as Shālīb; Murūdj VII p.103. Both names of father and daughter are Arabic names. It is interesting to note that while Suyūṭī Akhbār, p.132, says that she was the favourite of al-Rashīd Ibn al-Sa'i does not mention her in his Nisā' al-Khulfa' at all.

It is this uncertainty and obscurity which surrounds Mu'taṣim's early life and upbringing which are significant. Mention of him in his father's life-time is very rare. It is certain that neither his father nor any of those around him had the slightest idea that not only would Mu'taṣim become a Caliph but in fact have all the rest of the Abbasid Caliphs descended from him.¹ With all the care that al-Rashīd had taken to educate and train his sons Amīn, Ma'mūn and al-Qasim as befitted the sons of caliphs Mu'taṣim had no claims to a proper education at all. While his brothers had the best of teachers attending to them Mu'taṣim was sent to a madrasa like many other commoners. Whereas however, most of the commoners had some sort of education by attending regularly the schools, Mu'taṣim was destined to quit the school at a very tender age when he could hardly read or write. The story relating to this episode is amusing. It is said that Mu'taṣim used to go to the school in the company of a young slave. The slave died. al-Rashīd asked Mu'taṣim about the slave and Mu'taṣim promptly replied that he had died and was thus spared from going to school. On this al-Rashīd

1. Suyūṭī: Akḥbār, p.113. Here he says "Some said that al-Rashīd kept the Caliphate away from his son Mu'taṣim because Mu'taṣim was illiterate but God brought it to him and made all the rest of the Caliphs from his descendants."

said "and it has come about that you so hate the school as to see death as an escape from it? By the Lord, my son, you will not go to the school again." "They left him", the story goes on, "and he became illiterate. Elsewhere it is said that he used to write badly."¹ It is significant that the story is related in these sources which are of the secretaries' - Kuttāb - literature rather than of the chroniclers'. As such it is relatively late. That should not, however, make one discredit it, or if one discredits the story one need not doubt the inadequacy of Mu'taṣim's education. Contemporary or near-contemporary sources like Jāhiz's writings or the works of Ṭabari, Ya'qūbi, Mas'ūdi and Ibn Qutaiba do not throw much light upon his education. Their silence about this important aspect is a plausible reason to suppose its absence. In this respect it is interesting that Mu'taṣim does not have much of a place in al-Aghāni which reflects the cultural taste and education of the time. It is also significant that almost none of Jāhiz's treatises was addressed to Mu'taṣim in person. His part in the Inquisition which reached its climax in his reign with the Mihna of Aḥmad b. Hanbal, was a negative one, revealing

1. Ibn Kathīr: al-Bidaya, X, p.295; Ibn al-'Abbār: I'tāb p.58, Suyūti: Akhbār, p.132; Maqīzi: Kitāb al-Sulūk, I, p.16.

not only a lack of interest in the intellectual exploits of his brother Ma'mūn and the Mu'tazila or the period in general but also the poverty of his knowledge and education. In Ma'mūn's life his own voice was heard in the disputes on the creation of the Qur'ān, not simply as the voice of the Caliph who had the power of the State behind him but equally as the voice of the intellectual and passionate believer. Mu'taṣim's voice was only the voice of power. The arguments were those of Aḥmad b. Abī Du'ād. Perhaps it is this illiteracy of Mu'taṣim which the poet Di'bil meant when he described him as devoid of religion and mind.¹ Even the famous poem² of Abu Tammām in praise of Mu'taṣim on his victory in Amorium contains verses which could be understood as having some allusion to this.

This distance from intellectual and educated circles in his early days may explain the poverty of information about that period in Mu'taṣim's life. There are some references which show that his father who was not so keen on his education was nevertheless very fond of him.³ Some more reliable pieces of information show that Mu'taṣim took to hunting at a very early age as the sources mention this

1. Muntaḡayāt, p.123.

2. Ibid, p.71.

3. Suyuṭi: Akhbār. p.134.

to have taken place during his father's life-time.¹ This information is meagre, but from it one might deduce that Mu'taṣim was endowed with a practical nature and that, as the son of a caliph who was known for his interests in wars and jihād, Mu'taṣim took to giving vent to that nature in learning as best as he could the art of war. It is possible that his childhood games, in which he indulged instead of going to school or taking to study, were dominated by this spirit of war and jihād. It is possible too that his father encouraged him in this direction, as he used to take him hunting when Mu'taṣim was hardly fifteen years old. Moreover perhaps having failed in the circles of learning he consciously or unconsciously felt that his chances were in the field of war. Here, indeed, as will be seen, was his genius.

The picture is no clearer during the period of the Civil War. Mu'taṣim was young at that time. Unlike his other brothers and elder relatives he was not directly involved in the disputes of succession. Nor was he involved in the groups and intrigues of the court. It is difficult to know anything about his position and inclination in that period, important as it was. Up to that time he was far

1. Ya'qūbi: Buldān p.32; Tanūkhī: Nishwār, 8, p.28. The earliest date for Mu'taṣim's birth is 178 A.H., al-Rashīd died in 193 A.H.

away from the politics and policies of the period. His chances for the caliphate were not yet within sight. But then he emerged in Ma'mūn's reign with a train of Turkish soldiers.¹ These are referred to as his own. How and when he collected these Turks and for what purpose is not told. As a prince he had the wealth to collect and keep them and probably his military tendencies together with the troubled atmosphere of the civil war were amongst the causes which made him do so. What is significant however is that he emerged with that power and command ~~not~~ in the service of the caliph Ma'mūn but on the side of Baghdad and for the cause of the Abbasids in the wake of Ma'mūn's policy for the succession of the 'Alid 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍa. Could he have seen his possibilities at that time? By then al-Qāsim, his elder brother who was to succeed Ma'mūn had been removed from the succession. Only 'Abbās, the son of Ma'mūn, had a real stake in the problem of succession beside Mu'taṣim himself. Ma'mūn's uncles Ibrāhīm and Mansūr - sons of al-Mahdi - around whom the opposition to Ma'mūn's pro-'Alid policy was centered and with whom Mu'taṣim had

1. Tabari, p.1067; Ibn Qutaiba: al-Ma'ārif p.198; Tajārib, VI, p.437. From this episode in which Mu'taṣim with his Turks are said to have met some Khārijite rebels, one could see that there were not many of them. It is however significant that they were called the slaves - the possession (mamlūks) - of Mu'taṣim owing personal allegiance to him.

ranged himself for the time being, were older than Ma'mūn and were not likely to survive him, although Ibrahim in fact did. Again, the whole tradition of succession indicated that the odds were against Mu'taṣim.¹ All the same, Mu'taṣim had his chance remote as it was. Although to say that it was the drive for the Caliphate which motivated Mu'taṣim to take this stand is perhaps far-fetched, it is yet significant that his appearance in state affairs was linked with the issue of succession.

With the problem of the "'Alid succession" over after the death of 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, one loses track of Mu'taṣim for a while. But it is perhaps not far from the truth to assume that he was steadily and gradually proving his capabilities as a military commander while collecting more and more Turks. Māmūn was in great need of him in that period of revolts and changes in the army as well as the administration. Mu'taṣim was of particular importance in this matter being a brother of the caliph in whom the caliph had great trust.² It is to be remembered that although Mu'taṣim had opposed Ma'mūn's 'Alid policy of succession he

1. See A. Chejani: The Succession to the Rule in Islam. The choice after the first four caliphs was predominantly in favour of the direct line though in actual fact the result was not so in many cases especially when these were minors or in absence of the direct line.

2. al-Kindi: Kitāb al-Quḍāt p.119.

did not go to the extent of supporting the rival caliph Ibrahīm' b. al-Mahdi. From what is known about Mu'taṣim's attitude to this episode it seems that he was against this move of Ibrahīm. There is evidence that Mu'taṣim together with 'Abbas advised Ma'mūn to kill Ibrahīm as punishment for his deed.¹ There is also the fact that Mu'taṣim was not, as far as could be seen, in any way connected with Baghdad court circles and their intrigues in the period after Hanūn al-Rashīd. All these factors must have commended Mu'taṣim to Ma'mūn. Moreover, Ma'mūn, handling his state affairs by himself was in need of such men as Mu'taṣim to confide in.²

Mu'taṣim's star was rising.³ He was acquiring more power and importance. He was given the governorship of Syria and Egypt (213 A.H.)⁴. Both of these provinces were turbulent at the time. Syria was a centre of anti-Abbasid risings.⁵ In Egypt Copts as well as Arabs⁶ were giving

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1. Tabari, p.1076; Ibn Qutaiba: 'Uyūn al-'akhbār, I, p.100; cf. Tanūkhi: al-Faraj, p.45.
 2. Mas'ūdi: Tanbīh p.352.
 3. Tanūkhi: Nishwār, 8, p.28.
 4. Tabari, pp. 995, 1100; al-Kindi: Kitāb al-Wulāt, p.185.
 5. Tabari, pp. 1042, 1069.
 6. Tabari, pp. 1103, 1105, al-Kindi: op.cit., pp. 189-92; al-Maqrīzi: Khiṭaṭ: pp. 334-40; Ibn Khaldūn: 'Ibar, III, p.255.

much trouble to Ma'mūn in his later years with their continuous risings against his men and their policies. Egypt was also being attacked by raiders from Andalus and Byzantium.¹ The choice of Mu'taṣim was perhaps more for his military abilities than for his knowledge of state-craft or provincial administration. It seems that he had already acquired a reputation for being tough and savage. It is said that the people of Egypt feared him and went to the extent of sending a deputation to Ma'mūn to ask him to spare them the governorship of Mu'taṣim.² Nevertheless Mu'taṣim was getting more and more involved in state affairs.

It was becoming clear that together with Ma'mūn's son Abbas, Mu'taṣim was the caliph's right hand man. Of the remaining members of the ruling family these two were the closest to the Caliph Ma'mūn. What is significant is that there does not seem to have been any marked rivalry or clashes between the two. Ma'mūn himself was young and the issue of succession was perhaps not so urgent as to provoke such. Perhaps it was also because of Ma'mūn's policy of treating the two in such a manner as to give neither a cause to envy the other. Duties were often delegated to

1. al-Kindi: op.cit. pp. 163-8.
 2. al-Kindi: Kitāb al-Qudāt p.117.

them jointly.¹ In certain matters the advice of both of them was sought at the same time.² They shared in the duties of administration. When Mu'taṣim as governor of Egypt and Syria was asked to levy men and collect money and materials for the Byzantine campaigns of Ma'mūn Abbas as a governor of Jazīna was asked to do the same there.³ Both 'Abbās and Mu'taṣim were military men. But where Mu'taṣim had his own personal group of Turks beside the other sections of the Caliphal army which happened to fall under his command, 'Abbās had no such personal soldiers. Moreover Mu'taṣim was the older of the two and the more experienced. It is also possible to conclude that Mu'taṣim was a man of stronger character than al-'Abbās and such commanded more respect than he did.⁴ There is evidence that even before the settlement of the question of succession Ma'mūn had more confidence and trust in Mu'taṣim.⁵ But he was not nominated for succession. There is also no evidence that even then Mu'taṣim himself or any group amongst those near to the Caliph thought of or acted on that possibility. On the one

1. Tabari, pp. 1098, 110.

2. Ibn Qutaiba: 'Uyūn al-Akhbār, I, p.100; Tanūkhi: al-Faraj, p.45.

3. Tabari, pp.1100, 1112.

4. Ya'qūbi: III, p.197.

5. al-Kindi: Kitāb al-Qudāt p.119.

hand the issue did not arise; on the other hand there were so many problems that consumed the attention of Ma'mūn and his men, including Mu'taṣim. There were Ma'mūn's religious policies and the many revolts and risings.

It is interesting to note that despite the closeness of Mu'taṣim to Ma'mūn one does not find Mu'taṣim any closer to the circles of administration and secretaries. Nor is his name, or for that matter, that of al-'Abbās, anywhere mentioned in connection with the Mu'tazila or Ma'mūn's religious policies. It is a picture of the military man who was far away from politics and court intrigues that emerges. A gulf of different cultures and different training separated him from these groups of 'the men of the pen'. His place was amongst the 'men of the sword'. Yet even here Mu'taṣim was different as were the men around him. His image under Ma'mūn - and more so later as a caliph - was that of the chivalrous knight more than that of the successful commander, a fact which explains the recurrence of his name in later sagas and legends of heroism and individual exploits.¹ His love of accoutrements and

1. Mas'ūdi, VIII, p.302; idem: Tanbīh pp.354-5; al-Fakhri: p.316, Suyūṭi: Akhbār, p.133; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih: Iqd, III, pp.55-6, Maqrīzī: al-Sulūk, p.16. cf. M. Canard: Les Principaux Personages; H.Gregoire: Digenis Akritas et le Calife Mu'taṣim.

Byzantine attire and his craving to demonstrate his bodily strength and valour all point to this departure from the military tradition of his time.¹ This could have been due to the early years spent in learning the art and craft of war. It could have been too as a result of those turbulent years in Baghdad during the civil war and afterwards when security and safety lay in the hands of the fityān, the 'urāt, the 'ayyārūn and their like when a sense of chivalry and valour dominated the exploits of these groups. Mu'taṣim was physically very strong and was not lacking in chivalry. Certainly he did not belong to this class of common adventurers. He was a prince and later a caliph. In this respect he was perhaps the forerunner of Saif al-Dawla b. Ḥamdān whose reputation rested upon his courage and exploits against the Byzantines. The few poems on Mu'taṣim by Abū Tammām and others were but the forerunners of the many by al-Mutanabbi on Saif al-Dawla. This is the more so when one sees the reign of Mu'taṣim as a turning point in the history of border warfare relations between the Byzantines and the Abbasids before the breakdown of the Abbasid Caliphate into dynasties and amirates. Mu'taṣim was to lead the last major attack on the Byzantines while

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1. Arabic sources in 1 above. Also Tabari pp.1326-7. E.M., p.130.

the 'Abbasid empire was intact.¹

Equally different were his men. Their outlook and military training seem to have been different from the rest of the armies of the Caliphate who, whether they were Khurāsānis, Abnā', or Mawālī, were within the Abbasid imperial tradition and civilization.² Remembering that Mu'taṣim was to reign only eight years and eight months after Ma'mūn and that he had to face his major military operations almost immediately after the death of Ma'mūn in the campaigns against Bābak, Byzantium and the Zutt, it is safe to conclude that Mu'taṣim had gathered the bulk of these troops - his own troops - under Ma'mūn who had a long reign. This could be supported by the fact that Mu'taṣim was to build Samarra soon after his accession mainly to secure a safe place for these troops. It was these men who were rising in numbers and importance. Rivalry between them and the old groups of the army was thus inevitable. And it was these men who surrounded Mu'taṣim. Hence if the gulf of education had separated him from the administrative, the secretarial and

1. M. Canard: Les Expéditions, pp. 105-12.

2. There is not much in the sources about the military training or the day to day life of these troops. But from what there is in Jaḥīz treatise on the Turks (Risāla fi Manāqih al-Turk) or other references to them on such occasions as the building of Sāmarrā one gathers that they were in all sense newcomers to the Abbasid world. See below Chapter III.

the learned groups, the difference between his own outlook and that of his men and the rest of the army separated him from the old military men too. Here lay a danger, since Mu'taṣim could not be the bridge between the new and old elements in the army. The trend towards chivalry, with the cult of the hero - the military commander - and thereby the power of the individual to hold the imagination and the allegiance of the group, was dangerous too. Nor was Mu'taṣim possessed of the aptitude or the training to carry on the traditions of the Abbasid Caliphs. He was not meant to be one. But nevertheless a caliph he came to be.

It was on the Byzantine campaign of Ma'mūn of 218/833 that Mu'taṣim was nominated to succeed to the seat of the Abbasid Caliphs.¹ With Ma'mūn as general commander of that campaign was his son 'Abbās and his brother Mu'taṣim leading sections of the Abbasid army.² It was a well prepared campaign and the Abbasid armies had won initial victories. But then Ma'mūn was suddenly attacked by malaria. His illness grew serious. The thought of dying without settling the problem of succession when the affairs of the state

1. Tabari, pp.1133-4.

2. Tabari, pp.1135-6. Ibn Qutaiba: al-Ma'ārif, p.119. Bar-Habraeus I, p.133. Dinawarī's account says that al-'Abbās was not there. See below p.78, n.2.

internally and externally were much disturbed must have weighed heavily on Ma'mūn's mind and conscience. His advice to his successor reveals this. And he had to choose a successor. His choice fell upon his brother Mu'taṣim.

Had Ma'mūn a better choice in his son 'Abbas? 'Abbas did not become caliph and thus there is not much about him in the sources. Was it only the urgency of the problem and the atmosphere of the campaign with the possibility of some sort of pressure from Mu'taṣim's group of soldiers that made Ma'mūn nominate his warrior brother Mu'taṣim or would he have chosen Mu'taṣim anyway? The question is difficult, perhaps impossible to answer. But it is certain that in choosing Mu'taṣim - his brother, rather than 'Abbas his son, Ma'mūn had broken the accepted tradition of succession.¹ Although he had kept the caliphate in the family he did not maintain the practice of keeping it in the direct line when his son was not a minor. It is also possible to say that he did this consciously feeling it to be his duty as commander of the Muslims to choose for them the best possible person as Caliph.² According to this and

1. See above p. 67n.1.

2. Tabari, pp. 1137-40, Qalqashandi: Subh IX, pp. 362-6. In Tabari where Ma'mūn's last advice to Mu'taṣim is related there is a sentence that indicates that Ma'mūn's choice of Mu'taṣim was a deliberate one and that he knew that he was breaking away from the tradition in doing so. Here he is related to have said in relation to the caliphate "that I have transferred it from others to you". The addressee was Mu'taṣim.

what was said before about the relation between Mu'taṣim and Ma'mūn it could be assumed that Mu'taṣim's choice was not made on the spur of the moment nor as a result of pressure or the urgency of the situation.

Nevertheless the appointment of Mu'taṣim was sudden, unprepared for and unprecedented in many ways. It was only a matter of days between the nomination of Mu'taṣim and his assumption of power. In the past the practice amongst the Umayyads and the Abbasids was that the reigning Caliph would nominate his successor and see that homage and support were paid to him a long time in advance. Indeed the fact was that the Caliphs were so eager to secure that homage and support for their successors that the nomination of the successor was almost the next problem after the accession of a caliph. Ma'mūn himself had done with regard to this 'Alī b. Mūsa. But then with the latter's death, the problem of succession was, as it were, shelved till the last days of Ma'mūn. One is thus left to speculate whether that was a deliberate policy or whether it was the unexpectedness of such compelling circumstances as that which surrounded the death of Ma'mūn that made him leave that important issue till the last. Perhaps it was both. The nomination of a successor long in advance might have resulted

in the rise of camps and groups among Ma'mūn's supporters at a time when he needed complete unity to face the many burdens of his reign. But for Mu'tasim it meant that although he had no hard core of opposition as such on the issue of succession which had not arisen before, he had no long prepared group of supporters on that issue when it arose either. Yet opposition did arise, as did support, reflecting when they did the groupings and the differences between these groups around which they arose as well as the circumstances of the nomination. On this problem Tabari's account is the most detailed and perhaps the most accurate.¹ He says that in the year 218 A.H. the letters of Ma'mūn were sent to his governors addressed with "from the slave of God, 'Abd Allah al-Imām al-Ma'mūn, the commander of the believers, and his brother the successor caliph after him Abū Ishāq the son of the commander of the believers al-Rashīd". He then relates that it was said that Ma'mūn did not write thus, but that this was written during his awakening from a trance which prevailed upon him during his sickness, in accordance to a command which he made to his 'Abbās, to Ishāq and to 'Abd Allah b. Tahir,

1. Tabari, pp. 113-4.

that in case he died from that sickness of his the caliph should be Abū Ishāq - al-Mu'taṣim - son of the Commander of the Believers al-Raṣhīd. The letters were then written by Muḥammad b. Dāwūd. Further Ṭabari says that Ma'mūn sent for his son 'Abbās when his illness was very serious thinking that he would not see his Father alive but that al-'Abbās did see him in a state of physical and mental change and stayed with him for some days after the letters of nomination had already been sent. Ṭabari then adds that it was said that the nomination of Abū Ishāq al-Mu'taṣim was not made but in the presence of 'Abbās, the qāḍīs, the Fuqahā', the military commanders and the scribes.¹ It should be said here that Ṭabari's doubts do not concern the fact of the nomination² but the nature and sequence of events especially in regard to the whereabouts of al-'Abbās who from all accounts

1. Ṭabari, p. 1135; Ibn Kathīr: Al-Bidāya, X. p.280.

2. Dīnawarī in his al-'Akhbār al-Tiwāl has a completely different story. He says that Ma'mūn had already seen that homage was paid to his son 'Abbās as successor and left him in Irāq - when the former left for the Byzantine campaign. On the death of Ma'mūn - he says - Mu'taṣim gathered the distinguished generals and men and asked them to pay homage to him, which they did. He then went to Baghdad where he deposed 'Abbās having prevailed over him and then the people paid homage to Mu'taṣim. As such Dīnawarī's story could in no way be supported by other sources. See Dīnawarī's 'Akhbār', p.396.

seems to have been present at his father's death-bed. In this respect the situation is perhaps better explained by the fact that the whole thing had happened in the camp far away from the capital and hence the reports received directly or indirectly by Ṭabari and other writers were conflicting in that matter of detail. Yet the fact that the position of 'Abbās was the centre of the conflict is significant. 'Abbās was the alternative, perhaps the legitimate and hence expected candidate for succession to many. He himself did not seem to have harboured such ideas at the time as is evidenced from the prompt and categorical support which he readily gave to his uncle Mu'taṣim and the equally prompt and categorical rebuff which he gave to the sections of the army which wanted him to challenge Mu'taṣim.¹ This in itself supports the idea that 'Abbas was at least present at the time when his father made his desire known that Mu'taṣim was to succeed.²

'Abbās' rejection of the advances of his supporters for the caliphate must have been greatly appreciated by

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1. Ṭabari, pp.1133-5, 1164; E.M., p.1; Ya'qūbi, III, p.197; Ibn Qutaiba: al-Ma'arif, p.199; Ibn Kathir: al-Bidāya, p.281; Bar-Habraens, I, p.133.
 2. Ṭabari: p.1135. Ibn Qutaiba: op.cit. p.199. Mas'ūdi says that there was some dispute between Mu'taṣim and 'Abbas on the succession but that 'Abbās was led to pay homage to Mu'taṣim. Mas'ūdi, VII, p.103.

al-Mu'taṣim. It settled the issue in his favour and seems to have spared the caliphate the evils of a sharp conflict. According to Ṭabari it was reported that the people feared lest 'Abbās would contend with Mu'taṣim for the Caliphate but that they were spared that.¹ But the incident itself is very important as regards the fate of al-'Abbās and some others like Harthama b. A'yan who might have been amongst the generals who supported the accession of al-'Abbās.² The sources do not say much about the development of the incident or about the groups among whom it happened. It appears to have been abrupt and ephemeral. Ṭabari speaks about the jund (soldiers) who mutinied at the accession of Mu'taṣim and who asked for 'Abbās and addressed him as caliph.³ Ya'qūbi also tells of some generals who refused to pay homage to Mu'taṣim.⁴ Neither of the two accounts lacks support. Thus it was some soldiers and some generals who opposed Mu'taṣim. From the evidence in the sources, meagre as it is, especially that of Ya'qūbi who describes the relations between the rebel generals and 'Abbās and Mu'mūn, and from the knowledge of the composition

1. Ṭabari, p.1164; E.M., p.1.

2. E.I.(2) S.V. al-'Abbās b. al-Ma'mūn, E.I.(1) s.v. Harthama b. A'yan.

3. Ṭabari, p.1164; E.M., p.1; Ibn. Kathīr: al-Bidāya, X, p.281; Bar-Habracus, I, p.133.

4. Ya'qūbi, III, p.197; Ibn Qutaiba: al-Ma'ārif, p.199. Because 'Abbās was so close to his father.

of the army it is safe to conclude that the opposition came from the veteran generals and soldiers who saw the dangers of the ascendancy of Mu'taṣim and his new troops. This could be supported by the unfolding of events in Mu'taṣim's reign. Perhaps it was more anti-Mu'taṣim than pro-'Abbās, since the generals seeing his feats as a general and his closeness to Ma'mūn must already have resented Mu'taṣim in Ma'mūn's life time. It is significant too that this opposition seems to have been limited to the military circles, and so did not include the secretarial circles. It seems that these, unlike the soldiers, did not fear any interference from Mu'taṣim in their affairs. Moreover their position was actually safe-guarded in Ma'mūn's will to Mu'taṣim.¹ It should be mentioned/^{here} that by this time these groups had fallen greatly in power and influence in state-affairs now that the age of the "statesman wazīr-type" secretary had given way to the age of the "clerk-type secretary" who was more the tool rather than the initiator of policies. As such there were no distinct opposing groups in the court as before. Instead a sort of a esprit de corps prevailed, as witnessed by the Kuttāb class and their

1. Tabari, pp.1138-40. In fact Mu'taṣim could not have done that as he was uneducated and quite alien to these groups.

literature.¹ This was the more so as the power of the generals and the military men in general was rising. In itself this was a major and a significant development in the history of the Abbasid Caliphate. In that respect the ascendancy of Mu'tasim was no exception. He too was a general. His ascendancy was one of those rare historical incidents which everything seems to have conspired to bring about. The nomination and accession of Muhammad Abū Ishāq al-Mu'tasim, the illiterate warrior prince whose reign was one of conquests and military grandeur, took place during a campaign, amongst the soldiers and the generals. The issue was settled then and there. To the rest of the Umma his Muslim subjects, even to the capital Baghdad the issue seemed something for which their consent was required but the settlement of which was hardly their concern. Nor did it appear that they were concerned about it. As Tabari states - "It was said that people feared lest 'Abbās would contend with Mu'tasim for the Caliphate."² - it was a negative attitude, resigned and mild in its resignation. It sounds as though it were an issue distant and far removed from their own world. The Caliphate had already become

1. See Jāhiz: Dhamm Akhlāq al-Kuttāb

2. Tabari, p.1164; E.M. p.1.

a dynastic concern and a dynastic prerogative. Here again one notes the development in Abbasid history in particular and Islamic history in general. Up to the time of Hārūn al-Rashīd the consent of the Umma in sanctioning the nomination for the succession was sought. Now it was a problem settled by Ma'mūn on his deathbed with only his generals and official entourage to witness and carry out his command.¹ It was a military decision - establishing a military successor and leading to an increasingly military regime - not only because of its nature and circumstances but more so because it had come at a time when the dichotomy between the official and the unofficial side of the state was so marked and so grave in its consequences. Curiously enough Ma'mūn's last advice to Mu'taṣim shows that he was very concerned about the 'Awāmm, the common people. But in his own words these were the Ra'iyā, the subjects or the shepherded.² Gradually the Umma, Muslim Community, by losing interest in the issue of succession to the Caliphate lost its right and influence in settling it. Gradually too society was divided into the rulers and the ruled, its

1. This is very different from the nomination of 'Umar by Abū Bakr who did not see the issue as dynastic, nor settled it as a power alive to its rights in this issue which was settled with its power in mind.

2. Tabari, pp. 1137-8.

"official" and "unofficial" sides. Ma'mūn had spent a good deal of his reign vainly trying to bring these two sides together. Ultimately this meant that the Caliphate was losing its actual power and significance and becoming more and more a mere religious symbol. But here we see only the beginning of that development. Yet again it is significant that this should happen in the reign of Mu'taṣim, whose upbringing was so different from that of any preceding Caliph.

However the lack of interest of the Umma in the Caliphs and the Caliphate was not paralleled by a similar lack among the chroniclers. In the case of Mu'taṣim, now that he had become Caliph, the sources have more to say. After all he was the centre of interest. There appears, moreover, a degree of certainty. Thus one accepts Ṭabari's version that homage was paid to Mu'taṣim as Caliph on the 17th of Rajab 218/10th of August 833.¹ This took place on the Badnūn river on the Syro-Byzantine borders. It was the day on which Mamūn died. Mu'taṣim himself was not yet fully recovered from the malaria which had struck both him and

1. Ṭabari, p.1164, E.M., p.1., Ibn Qutaiba: al-Ma'arīf, p.199; Mas'ūdi, VII, p.102. Other sources give different dates due in certain cases to a detectable error i.e. taking Baqiyāna for Khalawna, i.e. remained for passed.

Ma'mūn.¹ The campaign against Byzantium was suspended. With 'Abbas and the rest of the troops he moved to Tarsūs where he paid the last homage to his late brother Mamūn whose body was buried there. He then ordered the destruction of all the fortifications built at the order of Ma'mūn in Tyana. Now that the campaign was suspended and the armies were moving back these fortifications would have been a menace to the Abbasids had they been left intact to fall in the hands of the Byzantines. Mu'taṣim then moved to Baghdad, in the company of Al-'Abbās. They reached the capital at the beginning of Ramaḍān 218/20th of September, 833.² It is curious that Ṭabari does not say anything about the Caliph's entry into his capital city or how he was met there, but goes onto mention the revolts in the region of the Jibāl, a fact which shows that the people were not as interested in the issue of succession as they were in the rising which affected their livings as well as their beliefs. There are also certain references which show that although the suspension of the campaigns which had hardly begun could be explained by a wisdom in those

1. Ṭabari, p.1135; Ibn Kathīr: al-Bidāya, p.281.

2. Ṭabari, p.1164; E.M., p.1, Ibn Qutaibā: al-Ma'arif, p.199; Ya'qūbi, III p.197. Ibn al-'Abbar in his 'I'tāb al-Kuttāb', p.55, says that Faql b. Marwān the secretary of Mu'taṣim saw that homage was paid to him in Baghdād before his arrival.

circumstances in which a change of Caliphs and disputes amongst the soldiers, as well as the advice of Ma'mūn played a rôle,¹ the speed with which it was carried out were necessitated by other factors. Ibn Qutaiba says that Mu'taṣim was afraid for his own safety of certain commanders who were about to kill him. Tabari does not say anything about this, but the trouble created by the soldiers reported by him amongst some others might very well have gone that far. If so the resort to the use of force by the army in settling the question of succession was not the innovation of the Turks. It was after all the veteran 'Abbāsīd soldiers who had killed Amīn. However that might have been, Mu'taṣim must have felt the need to hurry to Baghdād and see that homage was paid to him there. In that way he may have forestalled the development of further trouble by the soldiers or the rising of any group in support of 'Abbās, were there any possibility of that in Iraq. The return of the soldiers to their families must have been a factor in arresting their rebellious attitudes. On the other hand the whole thing could have been a result of the advice of Ma'mūn coupled with the sound policy of Mu'taṣim in weighing and balancing the problems which he had to face. This

1. Tabari, p.1138.

should not however minimise those problems which he had to meet from the start to make good his succession as a Caliph. It should also be remembered that with the opposition of some sectors of the old army the rift between him and these groups widened. From the start of his reign he had to calculate the risks from these quarters.

Thus began the reign of Mu'taṣim, unexpected, saluted with disputes and troubles and in unprecedented circumstances. By the very nature of these circumstances as well as by the unpolitical nature and training of the Caliph Mu'taṣim, it was destined to be a continuation of the previous reign. This was the essence of Ma'mūn's last words to Mu'taṣim.¹

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1. Unlike some other political testaments this had luckily not been used as a literary specimen and was thus saved from changes and alterations. It is only in Ṭabari that it is reported in some length; others only refer to it stressing certain parts of its contents in one way or another. As seen in Ṭabari it has a lot of the tone, far from literary clichés, of ordinary speech - one may add of a dying man. All the same it was nothing less than a policy programme for Mu'taṣim who was urged to settle internal and external wars - Zutt, Bābak and Byzantium -, to keep Ma'mūn's men in the administration - Aḥmad b. Abi Duād, Iṣḥāq to Ibrāhīm - to maintain good relations with the Tāhirds and the 'Alids, to follow Ma'mūn's policy of the Inquisition in relation to the problem of the Creation of the Qur'ān and to take care of his subjects. Ma'mūn also advised him against the appointment of a Wazīr. This is what Mu'taṣim in fact did and hence some doubt as to the authenticity of the testament may arise. However it should be remembered, together with the remarks above, that these problems were Ma'mūn's own problems and taking the circumstances of his death and those of the accession of Mu'taṣim it is more than likely that he spoke of them in that way. That the source is Ṭabari is also important as he was a near-contemporary and is reliable. Thus any doubts should be minimized if not completely removed. See A. Dietrich: Das Politische Testament, pp. 133-165; E.I. s.v. Waṣiyya.

By the nature of these factors too it was a reign in which the divisions of society and the deterioration of the status and power of the Caliphs and the Caliphate were to continue. Mu'tasim was not a statesman but a general. Only in this light can one see the suitability of his accession to that reign which was to settle the revolts of the Zuṭṭ, of Bābak and others and to see the famous march to Amarium.¹ But it was these warring exploits which paved the way for the ascendancy of the soldiers and hence furthered the alienation of the rulers from the ruled and ultimately the decline of the Caliphate.

1. See below Chapter V.

CHAPTER III

Mu'taṣim and the Turks

Throughout their expansion in Central Asia the Muslims were meeting with Turks, as settled and Iranized or as nomadic marauders. As early as the time of Caliph 'Uthmān, when the conquest of Khurāsān was hardly completed, the sources tell of some incursions of Turkish nomads in that province in the neighbourhood of Marw and as far as Nishāpūr.¹ Under the Umayyads, however, the Muslims came into direct contact with both Western and Northern Turkish Empires. Between the years 86-96/705-15 under Qutāba b. Muslim, the famous Umayyad governor, they won their first important victory over the Western Turks. Under Naṣr b. Sayyr in the year 121/738-9 they broke the power of the latter by defeating its dominant group, that of the Türgesh khāqāns. The empire of the Northern Turks was to come to an end shortly after that in the year 744.² Having prevailed over the settled, and hence according to Barthold, the civilised parts, and

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1. Ya'qūbi: Buldān p.56; Bālādhuri: Futūḥ, V, p.583; cf. Gibb: The Arab Conquests in Central Asia.
 2. Barthold: Histoire des Turcs, p.31; Wittek: Türkentum, p.495; E.I(I)s.v. Turks.

having broken the major threat to their rule there, the Umayyads then followed a defensive policy, as all those had done who preceded them in those regions.¹ With the rugged and mountainous nature of the land and the turbulent and nomadic Turks it was difficult and unrewarding to attempt a conquest. The problem was indeed one of defence against the constant inroads of the nomads into the settled parts. In facing that problem the Umayyads, and the Abbasids for some time after them, followed the practice of their predecessors, the Romans, the Greeks, the Byzantines and the Sassanids in dealing with similar situations, namely the building of defensive walls in strategic areas to stop the advance of the attackers.² The erection of these walls against the threat of the Turks was so common a practice that one Arabic writer explained the word Turk by alleging that it was derived from the Arabic verb Taraka, to leave behind. According to him they were so called because they were left

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1. Barthold: Histoire des Turc pp. 31-2. Wittek: Türkentum, p.509. It is to be remembered that the final victory over the Western Turks took place only some twenty years before the Abbasid Revolution.
 2. Mas'ūdi: Murūdj, II, pp.2-3; Ya'qūbi: Buldān, p.56; Qudāma: Kharāj, p.262; Ibn al-Faqīh: Buldān, p.304; Ibn Isfardiyyār, p.27; Barthold Histoire des Turc, p.32; Wittek: Türkentum, p.509.

behind the Wall of Alexander!¹ It was perhaps due to such notions as well as to the difficulties which faced the early Muslims with the Turks that the tradition of "Leave the Turks alone as long as they leave you alone" became current.²

Trade relations however continued and, through these as well as through the contacts with Muslims, Islamic influences found their way to the Turks. This was especially important in relation to the Northern Turks, with whom the Muslims did not have the same contacts they had with the Western Turks.³

Through these contacts, amongst other things, came also knowledge about the Turks, their kingdoms and empires, their languages and tribes, their settled as well as their trading centres. Yet despite the evidence that some of the early Arabic writers were aware of these things,⁴ most, if not all of them, used the word Turk to signify all Turks

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1. Ibn al-Faqīh: op.cit., p.399. Earlier, p.6., he gives a different explanation for the name. They were called Turks because of their egg-shaped faces. That was because of the constant cold to which they are exposed. Cf. Wilson, C.E. The Wall of Alexander and Lisān s.v. Trk. Also see Qur'ān, XVIII:90-1.
 2. Qudāma: Kharāj, p.262; Ibn al-Faqīh: Buldān, p.316. cf. Gold-zīhr: Muḥ.Stu., pp.270. Jahiz, Manāqib, p.34, attributes to Caliph Umer I a tradition which describes the Turks as an enemy difficult and unrewarding to pursue.
 3. Mas'ūdi: Murūdī, I, pp.298-300 and II pp.14-5; Barthold: Histoire des Turcs, pp.32,35; E.I. s.v. Turks.
 4. Mas'ūdi op.cit., I, pp.288-90 and II pp.58-64; Barthold: Histoire des Turcs, p.25.

and thus the word became synonymous with the nomads of the Central Asian Steppes. In this they were indeed not very much different from the Turks themselves who used the word Turk not in the ethnic so much as in a political and/or a linguistic sense.¹ Their empires, which extended from Mongolia and the northern frontiers of China to the Black Sea, were essentially nomadic ones. But needless to say not all the Turks were nomads nor were all of them contained within the boundaries of these empires. In their incursions into the neighbouring lands like Soghd, Ushrūsana, Tabaristān, Jurjān as well as Khurāsān, some were left behind who in time became part of the indigenous populations. In certain cases their own language prevailed over the local ones and owing to their use of the Turkish language even non-Turks were considered Turks.²

For the Abbasids khurāsān and the provinces around it had always their special significance. The important role played by these in the history of the dynasty need not be mentioned here. First the Abbasids followed the defensive role of the Umayyads vis-à-vis their neighbours east and

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1. Barthold op.cit., p.25; Wittek: Türkentum, p.495, E.I(I)s.v. Turks.
 2. Frye and Sayili: Turks, pp.194-5; Wittek: Türkentum, p.496; Barthold: Histoire des Turcs: pp.29-31; cf. B. Lewis: The Arabs in History. Introduction.

north-east of khurāsān. The change over to an offensive policy came, significantly, under Ma'mūn and then during the period when he was in Marw. Khurāsān had already been, in recognition of its importance, elevated to the status of a royal province before Ma'mūn.¹ Under him it became for a while a ruling province.² During his stay there as a prince and as a Caliph Ma'mūn came to grips with the defensive and even the offensive possibilities of the situation. For together with the dangers in these regions there lay the chances of territorial, religious and material expansion. There lay the land of promise. Unlike the other frontiers of the Abbasid world where political, religious and geographical barriers rendered penetration and expansion difficult if not impossible there were no such barriers here. Ma'mūn, whose relations with Irāq before and for some time after the death of Amīn, made it crucial for him to safeguard his position in Khurāsān and to look east and north-east for expansion as well as for securing Khurāsān itself, inaugurated a new era in Muslim-Turkish relations. The change seems to have been noticed and appreciated by early Muslim writers, as Balādhuri begins his statements

1. Barthold: Turkestan, pp. 197-8.

2. See Chapter I p.16.

on Ma'mūn's activities with the Arabic word fa-lammā, (and when) which indicates a new turn. He reports that, on his accession and during his stay in Khurāsān Ma'mūn used to send soldiers to Soghd, Ushrūsana and to the rebels from Farghana. Simultaneously he sent letters invoking people to accept Islam and come within the fold of the Caliphate.¹ This dual approach won him Rafi' b. al-Layth and his Turkish supporters as well as Maziyār of Tabaristan.² More important than this, perhaps, was the fact that under Ma'mūn, Nūḥ b. Asad the Sāmānīd and his three brothers became governors of Samarqand, Farghāna and Shāsh.³ With the collaboration of these Sāmānīd brothers and from those regions, especially Samarqand under Nūḥ, came the bulk of Mu'taṣim's new troops.

But although these new troops were commonly referred to as Turks not all of them were of Turkish origin. Amongst them there were the Maghariba group recruited from Egypt, or perhaps further west. According to Mas'ūdi these were of Arab origin, from Yemen and Qais.⁴ For those who came from the eastern districts from beyond Khurāsān and Mā-warā'

1. Futūḥ, V, pp. 603-4; Barthold: Turkestan, p.212.

2. Chapter I p.18 and Chapter V p.188.

3. Barthold: Turkestan, pp.109-11.

4. Mas'ūdi: Murūdj VII, p.118; idem: Tanbīh, p.356.

an-Nahr, Transoxania, there are sufficient references to their lands of origin to show that the name Turk was used indiscriminately.¹ The omission of the name in certain sources is indeed worthy of attention. Balādhuri relates that the majority of Mu'taṣim's troops were of the people of Transoxania, from Soghd, Farghāna, Ushrūsana, Shāsh and others. For him the Turks lay beyond these regions, as he goes on to report that the kings of these regions came to Mu'taṣim's court, that Islām was dominant among their population and that the latter had begun to invade the Turks beyond them.² In this he does not differ from others whose references to the inhabitants of the above mentioned regions and the Turks indicate that they do not regard them as the same people. Ibn al-Athīr, writing ^{in the wake of} under the Seljūqs, and Ibn Khaldūn, writing under the Mamlūks, do not mention the name Turk at all but refer to the Maghārība³ from Egypt and the Farāghina from Samarqand, Ushrūsana and Farghāna. Ya'qūbi, together with Tabari, reflecting the Baghdādi attitude use the name Turk for all

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1. Balādhuri: Futūh, V, p.606; Ya'qūbi: Buldān, pp.29-33; Mas'ūdi: note 2 on previous page; Jāhiz: Manāqib pp.5-8; Kāmil, VI, p.319; Ibar, III, p.257. Only the two latter sources give the names Farāghina and Maghārība as collective names for the two groups of the troops.
 2. Balādhuri: Futūh, V. p.606.
 3. Tabari, pp.1250, 1312 (E.M., pp.71, 118) mentions the Maghārība.

but give, here and there, indications to the differing origins of the troops although the former hardly mentions the Maghāribā group. Mas'ūdi, falling between the two groups of writers in time and place mentions the Maghāribā and while using the name Turk to cover all those coming from the eastern provinces he points out that they included non-Turks from Khurāsān, Farghāna and Ushrūsana. For Jāhiz all who came from the east were khurāsānis.¹

Indeed with the indiscriminate application of the words Turk and khurāsāni - used always in a regional sense - the Abbasid armies were certain to have had Turkish elements within their ranks much before the time of Mu'tasim. From the time of Manṣūr one encounters references to individuals described as Turks, in Iraq and elsewhere.² It is to be noted that almost in all the cases these individuals had acquired some measure of importance by having had some form of relation with a caliph, a ruler or a notable. Certainly there were others who could have been described in

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1. Jāhiz is here reporting the views of al-Faḥḥ b. Khāqān, to which he, however, subscribes and for which he argues. For them the only distinction between the Turks and the Khurāsānis was that the latter were settled and the former were nomads. Jāhiz's arguments for identifying the Turks with the Khurāsānids were a recognition of the importance of the latter's role in the rise of the Abbasids and in this State in his time.
 2. Tha'ālibi: Laṭā'if, p.15; Jahshiyārī: al-Wuzarā', p.134; Ibn al-Faqīh: Buldān, p.282; Ibn Badrūn: p.292. Tha'ālibi and Ibn Badrūn state that it was Manṣūr who first introduced Turks in the service of the Abbasid State.

the same way had the occasion arisen. But again one is not certain in which meaning the word Turk was used. That these were distinguished from the other Khurāsānis must have been due to their fitting the accepted meaning of the word Turk in that period - the nomad of the Central Asian Steppes who was not described as a khurāsāni, as the latter had been Islamized and probably Arabicized for a long time before coming to Irāq. For the Baghdādīs the problem was not that they were Turks but that they were ^{barbarians} savages, ('ulūj) and foreigners ('ajam).¹

Certainty about the origins of Mu'taṣim's new troops is perhaps not so important, although for those who explained Abbasid history as a glorious period of Persian influence followed by a dark one of Turkish domination the case is otherwise. What is important is that Mu'taṣim collected a good number, if not the majority, of these troops under Ma'mūn, in whose reign the necessity for the introduction of new elements in the army arose.² It is very probable that Ma'mūn had some other Turks in his armies besides those mentioned in connection with Mu'taṣim. When he was in Mārwa,

1. Tabari, p.1181; E.M., p.17; Ya'qūbi: Buldān, p.29, cf. Chapter IV.

2. See Chapter I above; Tabari, p.995; Barthold: Turkestan, p.212 note 5.

while the bulk of the Khurāsānⁿ soldiers were fighting, first against Amīn and then for the suppression of the many revolts in Iraq, Yemen and Syria, the gaps created by the absence of those soldiers must have been filled by new elements. These could not have been different from those which Mu'tasim collected from the East, the more so as it was Nuḥ b. Asad, a governor of Ma'mūn, through whom it was done. Jāhīz makes a reference to a group of Turkish soldiers who were waiting with others for Ma'mūn. While the others, except for three or four, relaxed on the ground after having been exposed to the mid-day heat, the Turks, save for three or four, kept their vigil on horseback. Jāhīz passes on to praise Mu'tasim for his wisdom in collecting such good troops, meaning the Turks.¹ His references do not make it clear whether the Turks mentioned, in connection with Ma'mūn were any other than Mu'tasim's. The important thing is that they were in the service of Ma'mūn. At that time they were a minority in number compared to the veterans who dominated them in rank also. The mention of the new troops in connection with Mu'tasim even at the

1. Jāhīz: Mānāqib, p.37.

time of Ma'mūn was perhaps because that he had no other troops. Even more likely it was because of what happened later in the reign of Mu'taṣim when the new troops became dominant in numbers and in rank. Jāhiz was a contemporary of Mu'taṣim but most of the other writers were not.

Moreover the group that Mu'taṣim had at the time of Ma'mūn, were not a contingent of soldiers under his command but were rather described as his slaves. The words applied in that respect were 'abīd, ghilmān and mamālīk.¹ The absence of the word mawālī is worthy of note. The nature of the relation between Mu'taṣim and his slave troop was not similar to that of the Walā' nor, for that matter, that of Walā' al-Iṣṭinā', Abnā' ad-Dawla or 'Arab ad-Dawla.² While the former related the individual or the group to the family, then the tribe, and finally to the Arabs in general, and the latter related the person to the state or the dynasty, Mu'taṣim's slaves owed him personal allegiance. This was perhaps the beginning of the slave army system which saw the climax of its development under the Mamlūks of Egypt. But again it is to be remembered that this began in Ma'mūn's reign. A prince and a provincial governor than, Mu'taṣim

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1. Ya'qūbī: Buldān, pp.29-30; Tabari, pp.1180-1; E.M., pp.15-6, Mas'ūdī: Tanbih, p.356; Yāqūt, III, p.16; Ibn al-Faqīh: Buldān, p.319; Ibn Kathīr: al-Bidāya, p.296; Suyūṭī: p.133 Wittek: Türkentum, p.510. cf. E.I.(2) 'Abd, E.I.(1) Mamlūk and Ghulām.
 2. E.I.(2) s.v. Abnā' and 'Arab ad-Dawla, E.I.(1) s.v. ^{MAWLĀ} ~~Walā'~~ and ~~Walā' al-Iṣṭinā'~~.

was first and foremost a commander. Taking into account the circumstances that prevailed in that period, and leaving aside the legal aspect, the relation between Mu'taṣim and his troops was inded not very different from that which existed between other commanders and their troops.

Furthermore, although the new troops were commonly described as slaves not all of them were so, which applies, perhaps, to the majority of them, especially in Sāmarra. Hence the description 'Abīd, Ghilmān and Mamālīk were as inexact as calling them Turks. Ibn al-Athīr and Ibn Khaldūn do not use these words, nor do they use the words jama'a "collected", or ishtarā, "bought" as do others, but relate that Mu'taṣim iṣṭana'a, "won over and used for his purposes", peoples from Egypt and others from Samerqand, Farghana and Ushrūsana. Jāḥiz uses the words iṣṭana'a and jama'a, "collected" but not the others. Tabari calls them ghilmān, (slaves). Ya'qūbi gives the impression that they were all bought and accordingly they were all slaves. Mas'ūdi uses all of the above descriptions but Baladhuri uses none of them, not even iṣṭan'a.¹

1. See p.95 note 1; cf. Bar-Habraeus p.140. Jāḥiz, Ibn al-Athīr and Ibn Khaldūn might have good reasons for not calling them slaves. But evidence shows that, together with Mas'ūdi and Baladhuri, they are more reliable than the other sources.

With these differences as to the nature of these troops, there are also some references to their numbers which may help one to come to a conclusion in that respect. These vary a great deal. But whether when Mu'taṣim was a prince, or at the time when he moved to Samarra or late in his reign the number of his so-called "Turkish" troops was too large to have been bought or owned by an individual, be he a prince or a caliph, without the support of the State. At their lowest number, at the time when Mu'taṣim was a prince, they were quite considerable. Ya'qūbi relates that they were three thousand and more; al-Kindi put them at four thousand.¹ Mu'taṣim could not possibly have been able to buy and maintain such numbers at that time. Under the Caliph it is clear that as a part of the army enrolled in the registers of the State, the Diwans, they drew their salaries from the Central Treasury. It is thus to be assumed that at the time of Ma'mūn also they had all been enrolled in the registers of the State from which they had their pay. Mu'taṣim himself was but in the service of the Caliphate. His own group of slaves, perhaps with

1. Ya'qūbi; Buldān, p.30, al-Kindi; al-Wulāt, p.188; here al-Kindi refers to the number of those who were with Mu'taṣim in Egypt in the year 214/829-30. All these numbers do not include the troops from the West but specifically refer to the so-called "Turkish" slaves.

a good number of Turks amongst them, was to be the core of the new troops, the name of which was linked with his but the majority of whom belonged to the State serving it as free men.

Beside the ones Mu'taṣim bought or collected from the Eastern provinces there were a few others he bought in Irāq itself. It is noteworthy that the leading figures among the new troops were from these. Amongst these were Ashinās, Ītākh, Bughā the Elder, Waṣīf, and Sīmā of Damascus, all whom rose to places of importance in the reign of Mu'taṣim and after.¹ They were already slaves of certain individuals, in Iraq and elsewhere. As such they must have learnt the language and known some of the customs of the people. Because of this not only were they to serve as a link between Mu'taṣim and the others but by doing so they were also to channel the latter's loyalty through their own to Mu'taṣim. For all concerned that was very opportune. As a governor and a commander Mu'taṣim had rivals whose rivalry nearly cost him the succession to the Caliphate, perhaps his life as well.² His reliance and increased use of these new elements then and after his

1. Ya'qūbi: Buldān, pp.29-30, cf. E.M., Index.

2. See Chapter II above.

accession was thus a result of his needs and circumstances much as it was for his early relations with them. His first emergence upon the political scene in the company of some of his Turks at a time when he was not directly connected with the affairs of the State is relevant here. For the new troops it was very rewarding to be related to a prince and a later Caliph who patronized them and took their cause in the face of deeply entrenched hostilities. It was this relationship of need and trust which paved their way to power and influence under Mu'taṣim. Coming at a time when not only the veteran soldiers but also the Irāqīs in general were mistrusted and discredited by the ruling caliphs, they found the shortest way to the centre of the State and the heart of the realm without difficulty or delay. The events of the reign which brought Mu'taṣim to a head-on collision with the veterans and discredited such new commanders as Afshīn were very decisive in that process. Those events which threatened the security of Mu'taṣim and the life of his favourite Turkish generals had in fact hastened their advance to positions of power and influence.¹

1. See below Chapter V.

Some of the new troops who were bought as slaves could only have been subjected to capture and sale while they were non-Muslims. Captives of war provided this. None of them could have served in the armies of the Caliphate if he was not Muslim. But while there are sufficient references to the (centres) from which they were bought, there is nothing as to the manner in which they were bought and presented to Mu'taṣim. The only evidence in this respect is that Mu'taṣim used to send a certain Ja'far al-Khushsh²ki to Samargand to Nūḥ b. Asad to buy Turks and that Ja'far used to return with a group of the latter every year. This, according to Ya'qūbi, was how Mu'taṣim had got his three thousand Turks during the reign of Ma'mūn.¹ Doubts as to the truth of this number had already been expressed. Were they already Muslims when they were bought for Mu'taṣim or did their conversion follow their purchase? There is no direct reference to this problem. They were all however described as non-Arabic speaking ('Ajam.) Even Ashinās who was bought in Baghdād belonged to this group according to Tabari.² There is no cause to doubt this statement as,

1. Ya'qūbi; Bulḍān, p.24.

2. Ya'qūbi; Bulḍān, p.24; Tabari, pp.1067, 1181; E.M. p.16., Ibn Miskowayh: Tajārib, VI, p.437.

together with their nomadic nature, it resulted in their being called Turks, despite the inclusion of some of Iranian origin, from Farghāna, Ushrusana and Shāsh which places were in fact the centres of their collection.¹ It is more than probable that most of them were converted to Islām before their coming to Irāq. Even before the rise of the Abbasids Islām was making headway in the provinces bordering on Khurāsan.

Through contacts with traders and individual wandering Sufis converts were made. That Islām was the religion of the State which had inherited the Sassanid Empire to whose civilization the nomads had always aspired was also an important factor in winning over adherents.² The active policy of Ma'mūn, followed by Mu'taṣim, in spreading Islām and pushing forward the boundaries of the State and its influence was but a speeding up of an already existing process. But evidence is that then it bore quick and important results. Mention of a number of rulers from these regions in the court of Mu'taṣim bears witness to this.³

1. Barthold; Turkestan, p.212.

2. Barthold; Histoire des Turcs, pp. 35-6, 47-8, 56-9; Wittek: Türkentum, p. 513. cf. Ibn Khaldūn: Muqaddima, p.147.

3. See above p.95, note 1. Balādhuri's statement could be taken to allude to group Islamization, the tribes accepting Islām after their leaders.

The type of Islām which they had adopted was what came later to be called Sunni Islam, in their case very much influenced by the spirit of Jihād which suited their nature and which was the mark of Islam in frontier provinces.¹ Perhaps what appealed to them most was the fact that together with the simplicity of its basic tenents Islām opened to them doors to careers which befitted their aptitudes: service in the army which beside regular pay provided chances for booty. The simplicity and, at the same time, the firmness of their new belief could perhaps be seen in the declaration of Bugha the Elder, when, wondering what the Inquisition of Ahmad b. Hanbal was about, stated that he knew no more of it than the declaration of the Articles of Faith, the Shahāda, and that the Caliph was a relation of the Prophet.²

On his accession Mu'tasim increased his efforts in recruiting new troops. In this he was not only pressed by his fears and misgivings regarding the veterans who had not accepted his elevation to the Caliphate without objection, but also for the many campaigns which he had to face. And

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1. cf. Nizām; Siyāsat-nāma, pp. 68, 165; cf. C.Cahen; The Turkish Invasion and Wittek; Devshirme and Shari'a. Nizām refers to Hanafi influence amongst the Turks.
 2. Abū Nu'aim; Hilyat, p.198; cf. Chapter I, p.43.

it was not merely for their suitability on political grounds but also for their being militarily the best for his purposes that Mu'taṣim did that. Professor Dūri has suggested that perhaps because Mu'taṣim's mother was a Turk that he introduced them in his services. But the basis of his suggestion, that Mu'taṣim's mother was a Turk, is doubtful, and probably untrue.¹ More relevant was perhaps Mu'taṣim's own convictions that they were the best of soldiers.² In his treatise on the Turks, where arguments for the qualities of the other elements of the army, the Abnā', the Khurāsānis and the Mawālī, are produced, as well as in other places, Jāhiz's description of the former makes it clear that they were the most suitable for the problems of the reign.³ Primarily horsemen, they were possessed with remarkable powers of endurance, and resourcefulness especially in difficult frontier conditions. Nor were they lacking in discipline and the ability to learn new techniques in regard to organized campaigns and siege warfare, as was revealed in the campaign against Byzantium.⁴ Moreover, from the little one

1. See Chapter II, pp.,

2. Taifūr: Kitāb Baghdād (Kawthari) p.80.

3. See Jāhiz; Manāqib, Idem: Hayawān, II, pp.353-4 and, III, p.161.

4. See below Chapter V.

knows about his own training in his youth as well as his image as cavalier, Mu'taṣim himself fitted well with his new troops.¹ The important problem is how many he had of these when he became Caliph. The idea that the Caliphal troops under Mu'taṣim were overwhelmingly composed of Turkish slaves is indeed not new. The relatively reasonable number of three thousand which he could acquire during the long reign of Ma'mūn, according to Ya'qūbi, was related to have been near twenty thousand by some sources and seventy thousands by others.² And this designated only the Turkish slave troops. Lack of proper appreciation of numbers had already been a subject of complaint by Ibn Khaldūn.³ Closer to the truth was perhaps Mas'ūdī's four thousand although he does not qualify it as Ya'qūbi does.⁴ Besides, the Turks were neither the only nor, even the dominant element in Mu'taṣim's army.⁵ Had they been so Mu'taṣim would have had no fear of their being killed by the veteran

1. See Chapter II above, pp. 65-7 and Chapter V below, pp. 176, 189.

2. Ya'qūbi: Buldān, p.29; Yāqūt, III, p.16; Ibn Kathīr; al-Bidāya, Habraeus, I, p.140; relates that on his death Mu'taṣim freed 8000 slaves and left 30000 for the stables.

3. Ibn Khaldūn; Muqaddima, p.10.

4. Mas'ūdī, VII, p.118.

5. See Jāhīz's Manāqib.

troops. The accounts of the campaigns of Mu'taṣim's reign with the description of the troops and their commanders show that the Caliphal Corps (jund al-Ḥadra)¹ were but a small section of the army. Even in Samarra, the city which was built mainly to garrison them, they were not the dominant group at that time.² Despite all his preference for and reliance upon these troops Mu'taṣim was not discriminating against the others in their favour. The fact that the Caliphal Corps was spared the brunt of the campaign against the Zūṭṭ was a question of technical suitability. Such also was the case with the campaign against Bābak in which they did take part and which was led by Afshīn, a favourite commander of Mu'taṣim. Afshīn's troops were indeed a part of these new troops. One notes that only after the discrediting of the old commanders, 'Ujaif, 'Abbās, Afshīn and others that Ashinās rose to a place of importance. Before that it was Mu'taṣim himself

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1. Jāhiz, Manāqib, p.5, speaks of Jund al-Khilāfa, the Caliphal troops, which includes the Jund al-Ḥadra, the Caliphal Corps. cf. Balādhuri Futūh, IV, p.474. It was the latter who were distinguished from the rest by their gold decorated girdles, Mas'ūdi, Musūdī VII, p.118, Suyūṭi, p.133. They were however, not of Turkish origin only. One notes that Afshīn of Ushrūsana and his officers probably all of Iranian origin, were amongst Mu'taṣim's body guards. cf. Tabari, p.1306; E.M., p.113.
 2. See Chapters IV, and V, below.

who could have been counted as the commander of his royal troops and as the equal, in that respect, of the veteran commanders.¹ The deposition and imprisonment of Ja'far b. Dīnār/al-Khayyāṭ, who had been elevated to the position of governor of Yemen, is yet another indication of Mu'taṣim's standard in his treatment of his favourite commanders.² Commenting on the subsequent problems that befell the Abbasid Caliphs in Samarra, Ibn Badrun points out that these came into being only after al-Wāthiq 227-232/842-847. Owing both to his personality and the respect which he commanded, argues Ibn Badrun, the Turkish slaves would not have dared to go against him.³ This could not have been more true than with Mu'taṣim himself, in whose reign the Turkish troops were the most loyal servants of the Caliphate. It is to be remembered that although some of them like Ītākḥ, Ja'far b. Dīnār and Ashīnās had risen to the position of provincial governor⁴ they were only so in their military capacities with no entrenched political positions like those of the Tahirids in Khurāsān, or, later, the Tūlūnids and the Ikhshīdids in

1. See Chapter V below.

2. Tabari, p.1303; E.M., p.110.

3. Ibn Badrūn, pp. 292-3.

4. Tabari, pp.1302-3, 1318; E.M., pp.110, 123.

Egypt. Throughout the reign of Mu'taṣim and his son and successor Wāthiq, they served the dynasty very well, quelling anti-Abbasid revolts and guarding the territorial integrity of the realm. In later years Mu'taṣim was reported to have expressed his regrets that he had fostered Afshīn, Ashinās, Ītākḥ and Waṣīf, who were according to him nothing compared to the four men who had been fostered by his brother Ma'mūn.¹ The important thing here is that his regret was expressed only in relation to an alternative situation and that Mu'taṣim expressed no overall regret in fostering the cause of the Turkish troops.

To the important observation of Ibn Badrūn referred to above, which besides putting the interference of the Turkish soldiers in historical perspective alluded subtly to the mediocrity of the Abbasid Caliphs in whose reigns these things took place, one may add that these were the symptoms and not the cause. The period characterised by the emptiness of the Caliphate,² which Ma'mūn had atrived

1. Tabari, pp. 1327-8; E.M., pp.130-1. Mu'taṣim was reported to have expressed this to Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Mus'ab b. al-Ḥusayn who together with his brother Muḥammad, his uncle Tahir b. al-Ḥusayn and the latter's son 'Abd Allah were said to have been the four men fostered by Ma'mūn. Ishāq was governor of Baghdād at the time. 'Abd Allah was governor of Khurāsān then.

2. Gibb, Government and Islam, p.120; cf. Chapter I.

so hard to remedy only to end in depending on what military power he could muster, was soon coupled to that of the isolation of the Caliphs and their troops in Sāmarra. That the age of the generals had already set in during the reign of Ma'mūn is not only to be seen in his choice of Mu'taṣim as successor but also in such remarks as that Ma'mūn's troops were not matched before, neither in numbers nor in weapons, the very remarks which were made about Mu'taṣim later.¹ It was the latter however under whom began that "Era of Isolation."² For this his image and that of his Turks came to be not only identified with the disturbances which partly lay behind the building of Sāmarra but also with all similar happenings that took place afterwards, and often with the causes of the decline of the Caliphate itself. One notes how their mention in the early sources was very much influenced by, if not identical to, that of the Baghdādīs. The latter's own reflection of them was limited and at the same time influenced by the disturbances which were caused

1. Taifūr; Kitāb Baghdād VI (Keller), p.12; Tabari, p.1236, E.M., pp.60-1.

2. By this is meant the period, 221-279/836-892, in which the Abbasid Califs ruled from Sāmarra. cf. E.I.(2) s.v. Abbasids; also G. Le Strange: Baghdād, p.13; E.M., p.15, n.105; Chapter IV below.

by some of them in Baghdād. Even their numbers were mentioned in those contexts. But for Jāhiz, who put up a magnificent defence of them, and the occasional mention of individuals in connection with particular events by Tabari, their move to Samarra marked the end of their mention as far as the reign of Mu'taṣim was concerned. In their attitude to the Turks the Baghdadis were perhaps in that respect influenced by what they know about them from Sasanid tradition as well as by what the Quran had to say about the nomads, in this case the A'rāb, (Arab nomads).¹ These Turks, who spoke no Arabic, were thus even worse. But despite this, Mu'taṣim's Turks as seen in the early sources were not taken to be representatives of an emerging dominant race. (This is yet a further argument in support of the view that they were only a group not even dominant numerically in Mu'taṣim's time.) The 'Turkish Invasion' par excellence was yet to come.² At the time of Mu'taṣim and for quite a period after him the break down of the frontiers between the Caliphate and the Turks had been in favour of the former. Under the Tāhārids and Sāmānids Islām had been the conquering power.

1. Sura IX, verse 94.

2. C. Cahen, The Turkish Invasion.

Nor do later writers, like Ibn Khaldūn and Ibn al-Athīr, who wrote after the advance of the Turks as far as Syria and Egypt, suggest any identification between Mu'tasim's troops and the Turks as such. As has been mentioned before, both of these writers called them the Farāghina as opposed to the Maghāriba and both groups were included in the designation "new troops".¹ This is so even though Ibn Khaldūn, faithful to his theories of kinship, decadence of civilizations and the cycles of rejuvenation based on the encroachment of the nomads over the settled population, did remark as such the advance of the Turks under the Seljuqs. But even here he only reveals this awareness in dealing with the rise of the Seljuqs, and introduces that by tracing the nomadic origins of the Turks.² It is perhaps worth mentioning that notwithstanding this awareness the important thing for him was that they were Muslims. The real problem that beset the Caliphate in his view was the break up of the Arab kinship and the division of the caliphate between Umayyads and Abbasids and later between the latter and the 'Alids.³ The only

1. C. Cahen, The Turkish Invasion, p.7.

2. Ibar, III, pp. 443, 450; cf. Muquddima, Index.

3. Ibar, III, p.170.

factor that tended to indicate a relation between Mu'taṣim's Turks, when they were mentioned, and the Turks in general was not that the former were the heralds of the advance of the Turkish wave, but that they were all fearless, dangerous and uncivilized nomads. Even Nizām al-Mulk, whose overlords were Turks, speaks of the Turks in these general terms, although it is quite clear that for him as well as for his contemporaries any degrading remarks were meant to refer to the Turkomans and not the Seljuq ruling circles.¹ The identification of Mu'taṣim's Turks with all the Turks and of the latter with all that beset the Caliphate and the Arab world in particular is a modern phenomenon resulting from ideas of Nationalism and the recent unhappy venture in Arab-Turkish relations. Indeed such a projection could not have developed earlier while the Turks were still seen either as a caste of slaves or the saviours of the Caliphate and Sunni Islām from the Shī'is and the Dailamites, not to mention the Crusades and the Byzantium reconquest.

1. Nizām; Siyāsat-nāma. Use Index for Turks; E.I. (1) s.v. Turkoman.

One may wonder whether there was any choice left for Mu'tasim, caught up in that age of regionalism, weak central administration and dependence on military support, but to surround himself by the best and most loyal of troops. The question as to the possibility of his suiting this with other policies not only reveals a projection back into his reign of what happened after it, but also ignores the facts about his upbringing and circumstances all over.¹ His administration was left to the very men who had worked with Ma'mūn and who had been recommended by the latter.² Beside the reasons already advanced for his choice of troops from the East there was the fact that he was in Irāq where, even had he desired, there were not sufficient elements to fill in the ranks of the army among the mostly settled and urbanized population. This geographical factor is relevant to Egypt also. It was in these two provinces that the rule of the Abbasids was based mostly upon dependence on foreign troops. For Mu'tasim's troops, already foreign when introduced in Irāq, their alienation was made doubly so by their isolation in Samarra

1. See Chapter II above.

2. See D. Sourdél: Le Visirat Abbaside, I, pp. 245-60; cf. Chapter II, p. 87.

and the policy of separate settlements and non-integration.¹

The 'Era of Isolation', begun with Mu'tasim's move to Sāmarra with his troops, had seen the reduction of the Abbasid Caliph to a de facto position of regional rulers or even less. What local support, or semblance of local support, there was for the Abbasid Caliphate, apparent in the days of Ma'mūn among the Baghdādīs, at that time for practical reasons, disappeared with their active role in making it incumbent upon Mu'tasim to leave their city.² Compared to the Tāhirids or even the Ikhshīdids later the Caliph was in a weak situation. The Tāhirids had local support, he had not. The Ikhshīdids were provincial governors. He was not. He was the Caliph, the overlord of all. What is more, isolated and deprived of local support, the Caliph came gradually to be the prisoner of his own troops. Enclosed by Muslim lands the latter were hardly engaged in the border problems, which was the case with Tāhirid armies and equally so with the Tūlūnids and the Ikhshīdids. For Mu'tasim

1. See Chapter IV below.

2. See Chapter IV below.

this was not so. Despite the problems he faced and the confirmation of the Tāhirids in Khurāsān he was still the master of the situation. His troops defeated Bābak, Maziyār and marched into Byzantium.¹

1. See Chapter V below.

CHAPTER IV

The founding of a new capital: SĀMARRA

"Surra-man-ra'ā", says Mas'ūdī, "is the last of the great cities founded in Islām."¹ Seven in all, till the time of Mas'ūdī, these were according to him, al-Baṣra founded in 17/638/9., al-Kūfa founded in 17/638-9, al-Fuṣṭāṭ founded in 20/640-1, Ramla,² Wāsiṭ founded in 13-14/634-6, Baghdād founded in 145/762-3 and Surra-man-ra'ā founded in 221/834-5. The one thing that they had in common was that they were all except for Ramla, garrison cities. Built on the edge of the desert, the natural refuge for the predominantly nomadic Arab invading armies, the first five cities maintained all along an Arab-Islamic tradition. Rising almost simultaneously, except for Ramla, and providing in the short intervals between their emergence historical

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1. Mas'ūdī: Tanbīh: p.357, The omission of such cities like Qum and Qairawān is an indication of the feeling of regionalism of the time of Mas'ūdī, whose attention was centred on the central lands of the Abbasid Caliphate.
 2. Ramla was made into an Islamic city by Sulayman b. 'Abd al-Malik when he was governor of Palestine under his brother Walīd. When he became Caliph he looked after its development. It never had, however, the same importance or influence as the others. See E.I.(1) s.v. Ramla.

landmarks in the rapid expansion of the Islamic Empire in its early stages, these five cities were populated on the whole by Muslim Arabs who were to safeguard the conquests and gradually absorb rather than be absorbed by other elements. In this way they were able to maintain that Arab-Islamic tradition which, challenged later by the heterogeneous cultural heritage of what became the Islamic World, was able to keep it Islamic if not on the whole Arabic.¹ This was the fulfilment of the policy of the Caliph 'Umar I under whose reign the major Islamic conquests were made and who, for direct strategic reasons, advised his generals to camp their troops on the borders of the desert Arab lands and those of the newly acquired countries.² But where four of the first five of these cities developed from camps into the cities they came to be, with only one of them, al-Kūfa,³ ever being a capital city and then only for a short while, the last two - Baghdād and Sāmarra - were founded with the explicit intention of their being

1. See C.Pellat: Le Millieu Basrien; J.Hell: Kultur der Araber, pp. 55-6,X, de Planhol: The World of Islām, pp. 2-3.

2. See Tabari 1st. ser. years 14/5 A.H.

3. Under 'Alī b. Abī Tlib and it was the second capital, Madina being the first one in Islām.

capital cities as well as garrisons.¹ In this aspect the first five belong to the development of the Islamic Empire and the last two to the dynastical and political development within the empire, being built as they were when that empire was centuries old. Not that the first five were restricted to that rôle or that the last two did not play their parts in the development of the Empire in its diverse aspects but that at the time of their foundation that distinction could be made.

Yet, Mu'taṣim, the founder of Sāmarrā, was but the great grandson of Maṣṣūr, the founder of Baghdād. There had been no change of dynasty. What, then, were the reasons and the circumstances which made Mu'taṣim abandon the Abbasid Capital not long after Baghdād had secured the Abbasid succession to the Caliphate - a victory the first to benefit from which was Mu'taṣim himself - and at a time when it had no rival in its material and cultural supremacy in the Abbasid world?²

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1. Under the Umayyads one notes a further development in the founding of Islamic cities. Ramla was an administrative capital while Waṣīt was a garrison city for the Syrian army in Irāq. As such these differed from the Amṣār of the conquest. This separation had significantly ended with the rise of the Abbasids whose power was closely associated with and dependent on the army and the bureaucracy.
 2. See above Ch.I: Ya'qūbi: Buldān, pp. 4-5, 24, Tha'ālibi: Latā'if, pp. 104-7, E.I. s.v. Baghdad.

At that time Baghdād was over seventy-five years old. During those momentous years the garrison capital had grown into a metropolis, the metropolis of the Islamic Empire. Blessed with a unique geographical situation in an empire the economy of which was trading and agricultural and benefiting from being the seat of government and the abode of the Caliphs, it rapidly became the embodiment of the splendours of the material and cultural wealth of the Abbasid World. That material and cultural wealth was continually changing the character and attitudes of the ever-increasing population of Baghdād.¹ In that period it had been the capital of six Caliphs. It saw the rise and fall of the Barmecides and withstood the Civil War between Amīn and Ma'mūn. Though at the end of that war it was besieged, damaged and defeated after the heroic stand of its people for more than a year, it was soon after to win a vital victory over Marw, then the capital of Ma'mūn, when the people of Baghdād forced Ma'mūn to abandon his pro-'Alid policies and leave Khurāsān for Irāq. This was no longer the Baghdād of

1. If one is to choose one writer whose life and works are, perhaps, the best illustration of this, Jahiz would be he. For a list of his works see: C. Pellat: Arabica III, pp. 147-180. See also the description of Baghdād in Ya'qubī's and Yaqūt's Buldān.

Mansūr, built to protect him and his supporters from the anti-Abbasid influences of Kūfā.¹ That was but the nucleus of what became a city with its own character, its own importance and influence and its own rights. Since its foundation it had so grown in size, variety of population, wealth and character, that where the court and garrison were at the time of its foundation was now only a part of Baghdād and dominated by the rest. Under Mu'taṣim Baghdād could dispense with both court and garrison. The city of Mansūr had grown into a power which could impose its will over his successors.

Yet until now Baghdād had been instrumental in preserving within its boundaries the Court and the centre of government. Under Mu'taṣim, however, Baghdād appeared anxious to be rid of these. So far these had been very vital for the flourishing of its commercial and cultural life. With the accession of Mu'taṣim the situation had changed. With regard to its culture he had neither the aptitude nor the training to appreciate and patronize such things. Yaqūt reports that Mu'taṣim did not like Baghdād.² He was but a stranger to the

1. Yaqūt, Buldān, I, p.680.

2. Yaqūt: Buldān, I, p.691.

mood and spirit of that city which seemed to have accepted his accession as a matter of course, with neither joy nor regret. For Di'bil who was perhaps very much in tune with that mood and spirit his accession was simply one of the ironies of fate.¹ Regarding commerce the city of Baghdād seems to have developed its activities to a degree that made the presence of the Court not of great importance.² Indeed the evidence is that even after the rise of Samarra, with all the efforts of the caliphs who ruled there to draw the attention and interests of the people to it, Baghdād maintained its material and cultural supremacy. It could maintain its position because it had a better geographical situation as well as a tradition and a lead in those fields. Sāmarrā with its court and garrison and with its governmental departments was after all not far away. Moreover left to the administration of the Tāharids who supported its cause in the rivalry with Samarra, Baghdād had a better administration than Sāmarrā and seemed to preserve a strong connection with the main Tāhirid region in Khūrāsān.³ It survived

1. Muntaqayat, p.123; Diwān pp. 13-4.

2. S.D.Goitein: The Rise, pp. 583-604.

3. G. le Strange: Baghdād, p.311.

Samarra as a capital and all along it was a powerful alternative to it as is evidenced from the attempts of such caliph as al-Musta 'īn who had to seek its support when he wanted free himself from the soldiers of Samarra.¹ For the Baghdādīs it was those things which affected its material, social and cultural life that mattered. The presence of the court or its absence was seen from that angle. And on these things Baghdād stood to lose with the presence of Mu'taṣim's court, which meant the presence of his unruly soldiers as well.² That is why the Baghdādīs were active and vocal in making Mu'taṣim abandon their city. No patron of culture, his court was not a great stimulant to trade. On the contrary his soldiers, Turks and others, were a menace to the peace and security of the city and a cause of disruption to its social, cultural as well as commercial life. These used to gallop in the streets of the city, their horses injuring and killing children, women and men.³ Their behaviour towards women, like

1. Ibid., p.311.

2. Yaqūt: Buldān, III, p.17; Ibn Hamdūn: Tadhkira, p.104.

3. Tabari, p.1181; E.M., pp.16-17; Ya'qūbi: Buldān, p.30, Ma'sūdi, VII, p.118; Idem; Tanbīh, p.356; Bāla'ami, IV, pp.524-5.

that of most of the soldiers in their situation, and seems to have aroused many problems.¹ Thus they provoked the feeling of the Baghdādīs against them and against the caliph who was the primary cause for their being there. The people retaliated by injuring and killing some of them.² But that was no solution to the problem, for the incidents continued. The Baghdādīs had to rid themselves of the menace completely by freeing their city from the presence of those unruly soldiers and making it into what it was often called, a 'city of peace' (madīnat al-Salām).

The development of the opposition, which included all the different elements of the Baghdādīs, to that situation is interesting. In its different stages it shows how keen they were to preserve of the court only what suited their interests. First they sought of Mu'taṣim to curb the excesses of the soldiers.³ If that could be done, the presence of the soldiers would stimulate the commercial activities of the city and they themselves might be gradually influenced, perhaps absorbed,

1. Yaqūt: Buldān, III, p.16; Ibn Ḥamdūn: Tadhkira, p.104.

2. See above, p. n. 4.

3. Yaqūt, Buldān, III, p.17; Ibn Ḥamdūn, op.cit., p.104.

by its population, giving it thereby more vitality and power. But that could not be done. Then their request was that Mu'taṣim move his soldiers outside the city without moving his court with them.¹ That would have kept the court and government in Baghdād. But Mu'taṣim could not remain without his soldiers. Only when the Baghdādīs realized that they had to accept all or lose all, they made it clear that they would rather lose all than leave their city to the mercy of Mu'taṣim's soldiers. In this stand they seem to have been possessed of a political maturity that made them realize that after all Mu'taṣim could not go far away from Baghdād. Previous traditions pointed that way² and the current political situation with entrenched regionalism, the Tāhirids in Khurāsān, and revolts against Mu'taṣim almost everywhere, showed that Irāq was the only safe place for an Abbasid Caliph.³

Baghdād thus came to the conclusion that it was better off without Mu'taṣim and his Turks. For

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1. Yaḡūt, *Buldān*, III, p.17, Ibn Ḥamdūn, *Tadhkira*, p.104.
 2. E.I. (1), s.v. Qāṭul, Raḡḡa, below, p. .
 3. See Ch. I above and Ch. V. below.

Mu'taṣim there were equally important reasons which necessitated the move from Baghdād. These were no less than the safety of his life and that of his troops upon which his reign depended. The hostility of the Baghdādīs to his new troops was coupled with a differently motivated hostility of some of the old troops. It was to the Abnā' that Ṭabari attributes the sporadic killing of some of the new troops in the street incidents of Baghdād.¹ For Ya'qūbi it was the common people who were responsible.² For Mas'ūdi it was the common people in one instance, the people of Baghdād with no special reference to a particular group in another.³ Furthermore Ṭabari states that Mu'taṣim expressed fear of another group of the old troops, the Harbiyya,⁴

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1. Ṭabari, p.1181; E.M., pp.16-7, E.M. p.16, translates Abnā' as the 'young men (the natives.)' Ṭabari, perhaps, meant those of the veterans troops who were of mixed Arab-Persian descent or those who were related to the Abbasid dynasty. Cf. Jāhiz: Manāqib, pp. 6-7, 15-9; E.I. (2), s.v. Abnā'.
 2. Ya'qūbi, Buldān, p.30.
 3. Mas'ūdī, VII, p.119; idem, Tanbīh, p.356.
 4. Name of the corps and the place in which it resided. The corps was mainly of Persian infantry. Both place and corps were related to Harb b. 'Abd. Allah al-Balkhi, see Balādhuri: Futūh, IV, p.415; G.Le Strange, Baghdād: Index., E.M., p.15. translates Harbiyya as "warriors"; in n. 105a she calls them the Arabs.

on deciding to leave Baghdād.¹ It was for these reasons more than because of the protestations and opposition of the Baghdādīs that Mu'taṣim deemed it necessary to abandon Baghdād for a place where he could eliminate the possibility of a sudden attack from the Ḥarbiyya upon his new troops and at the same time be able to descend on the former with the latter if the need arose. It thus became his explicit intention to move to a place north of Baghdād, upstream - and thereby be, geographically, 'over' these soldiers, (fawqahum) where he could have the advantage of land and water attack.²

It is relevant to note here that Mu'taṣim was not the first to seek an alternative to Baghdād. His father Harūn al-Rashīd, who had spent quite a good deal of time in Raqqā, was also known to have founded a new city in al-Qātūl "having feared from the Jund (soldiers)

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1. Ṭabari, pp. 1179/80; E.M., pp. 15-6; Yāqūt Buldān, III, p.16; Ibn Hamudūn: Tadhkira, p.104, N'uman Thabit, al-Jundiyya fi al Dawla al-Abbassiya, pp. 35-6, Ṭabari says that the Turkish troops also complained of the killing of their mates.
 2. P.128, n. 1, above; al-Fakhri: p.319. E.M., p.15, gives an interesting translation for the phrase containing the word fawqahum. "...and kill my pages and me on top of them.", she writes. This, however, does not carry the sense of the phrase or the whole piece as it is in Ṭabari, p.1180. Cf. al-Fakhri, p.319.

what Mu'taṣim feared", as Ṭabari writes.¹ His brother Ma'mūn, who stayed in Marw at the beginning of his reign, is also said to have spent much time at al-Shammāsiyyā, outside Baghdād. The growth of Baghdād itself was largely due to the building of residences in the outskirts of the city by caliphs, princes, secretaries and the like. It is suggested that perhaps Mu'taṣim was motivated by the desire to follow the example of some of his predecessors who founded cities or new quarters of cities in their names for reasons of fame and prestige.² But this had hardly been the case with the foundation of previous capital cities, all of which had solid political and strategic reasons for their emergence. Besides, for Mu'taṣim the sources do not suggest this.

Like his predecessors Mu'taṣim tried places near to Baghdād. He first moved to al-Shammāsiyya, the place which Ma'mūn used to frequent for months, but that proved to be too small for his purposes and too close to Baghdād.³ He then moved to al-Baradhān, only to leave

1. Ṭabari, p.1180; E.M., p.16; Balādhuri, Futūḥ, IV, p.417, Yāqūt, Buldān, III, p.16; al-Fakhri, p.319; Bala'emi, IV, pp.523/4.

2. Nāji al-Aṣīl: Madīnat al-Mu'taṣim, p.164. This tendency to build new cities was quite common among members of the ruling families in Islām. The Umayyāds had already a summer residence in al-Rasāfa; so had the Abbasids and others similar pleasure or seasonal residences. See X. de Planhol: The World of Islām, p.4.

3. Ya'qūbi: Buldān, p.30.

it for a place called Bāḥamsa on the eastern bank of the Tigris, in its turn abandoned for al-Maṭīra. From there Mu'taṣim went to al-Qāṭūl which had been founded by his father al-Raṣhīd. There he planned his new capital, extending the river Qāṭūl to the centre of the city and plotting the different quarters for the commanders, the soldiers, the secretaries and the common people and the market places on the banks of both rivers, the Qāṭūl and the Tigris.¹ Here the sources differ, with Ṭabari and Mas'ūdī going to opposite extremes. According to Ṭabari there was one uninterrupted move from Baghdād to Sāmarrā. He does not mention any building in Qāṭūl but says that tents were pitched for Mu'taṣim and the people in Qāṭūl and that Mu'taṣim kept on the move till he reached the site of Sāmarrā and began building there.² According to Mas'ūdī not only did Mu'taṣim build a palace in Qāṭūl and call upon the people to move to his new capital, but that Baghdād was almost deserted as a result of the move to the new city.³ Yāqūt's version which states that

1. Ya'qūbi: Bulḍān, p.30.

2. Ṭabari, pp. 1180-1; E.M. pp 15-7.

3. Mas'ūdī, VII, p.119.

Mu'taṣim went straight to Sāmarrā is close to Ṭabari's, probably copied from it or from the same sources.¹ He, however, comes closer to the others, Mas'ūdī and Ya'qūbī, in a different version.² Ya'qūbī's version is on the other hand, nearer to Mas'ūdī, who seems to have copied from Ya'qūbī with additions from other sources.³ Ya'qūbī says that Mu'taṣim started the building of Qāṭūl having allocated plots to the generals, the secretaries, the common people and the market places on the banks of the two rivers. The building rose to a considerable height while Mu'taṣim stayed in quarters made specially for him, as did the other people. Qāṭūl was then abandoned on finding that the nature of the soil was difficult to build upon. This is the most acceptable version of all. While it is difficult to accept the idea of Mu'taṣim pitching and moving his tents from one place to another from Baghdād to Sāmarrā, it is equally difficult to accept the idea of Qāṭūl rising so quickly to a position which almost drained Baghdād of its population. Ṭabari himself mentions

1. Yaḡūt, Bulḡan, IV, p.17.

2. " " " , pp.15-16.

3. Ya'qūbī, op.cit., pp. 30-2.

Mu'tasim's move to Qāṭūl in a manner which suggests that he was not merely passing through it. Moreover, archaeological findings support the fact that Mu'tasim did start a city in Qāṭūl.¹ In any case these places mentioned above were not far from either Baghdād or Sāmarra.

Like Baghdād, Sāmarra was built on the site of an ancient city. However, with regard to the geographical situation which made Baghdād a centre of commerce - being the meeting point of land and waterways, and having the proximity of important sea ports like Baṣra and Ubulla, as well as centres of culture like Kūfa, Baṣra and ancient Ctesiphon, Sāmarra was no match for Baghdād. The story of how and why Mu'tasim chose the site, how he bought it and the tradition circulated in connection with the name, the history and the fate of the place has been told by many. So too are the topographical and architectural characteristics of the city of Samarra from the time of its foundation throughout the period in which it was an Abbasid capital.² These need not be repeated here.

1. See Nāji al-Asīl: Madinat al-Mu'tasim.
2. Ya'qūbī: Buldān, p.31; Mas'ūdī: Tamhīd, p.357; idem: Murūdī VII, pp.120/1; Ya'qūbī, Buldān, III, p.15; Bala'ami, IV, pp.524/5. Also see E.Herzfeld, Geschichte der Stadt Samarra, F.Sarre & E.Herzfeld, Ausgrabungen von Samarra, H.Viollet, Description du Palais d' al-Moutarsin and "Un Palais Musulman du IXe Siecle" and Creswell, Early Muslim Architecture, B.Francis & M.Ali: Jāmis Abi Dulaf.

Certain aspects of these should however be emphasized.

The sources speak of Mu'tasim's move to Sāmarra, his new capital, with his troops, his secretaries and other people in year 221/835-36 in which he began the foundation of that city. Leaving aside the ordinary quarters of the troops and the commoners these sources speak of the founding of a number of palaces built as residences for Mu'tasim himself, for some of his generals and for other important men in the administration. Beside these there were the mosques, the market places, the public baths and governmental buildings. It is not clear whether or not that these buildings were completed within that year but the general impression is that they were.¹ But whether or not they were then completed, the enormity of the project reflects a great deal on the financial, and material powers of the Abbasid State despite a long civil war not very far behind and a series of major revolts at hand. For the founding of the city, land surveyors, civil engineers, architects, skilled workers and building materials, were drawn from all over the Abbasid world, notably

1. The palace known as al-Jawsaq was built between 221-5/835-40, cf. D.S.Rice: Deacon or Drink, p.15.

from Iraq, Syria and Egypt. Baghdād seemed to have provided the example to be followed, especially in the lay out of markets and craft-centres, or to be departed from, as was the case with the general outlook of the new capital. Where the garrison of Baghdād in the early period of its foundation was contained together with the court and the government buildings within the round walls of the small city of Mansūr, Sāmarra had no round walls. Mansūr, then involved in the process of cementing the ascendancy of the Abbasid dynasty against its enemies and against the fanatics and malcontents from amongst his own supporters, was more pressed for safety and security and more directly threatened in these aspects than Mu'tasim who saw in the move from Baghdād the solution of these problems. Sāmarra was his city and that of his own troops. It is also clear that Mansūr felt that the garrison would only be the centre around which the city would grow. Moreover, with Baghdād in the background Mu'tasim was determined to build a city that would rival Baghdād.

The description of Sāmarra, as founded by Mu'tasim and developed by his successors, seen in works of such

as Ya'qūbi, Mas'ūdi, Yaqūt and others, and supported by archaeological findings, is of a city having all the features of an Islamic capital such as mosques, palaces, gardens, public baths, market places, craft centres, diwāns, police headquarters, prisons, stables and the like.¹ The remarkable feature of Sāmarrā was that it was a well planned city from the start. As if to avoid the collisions which used to take place in Baghdād the streets of Sāmarrā were wide and long. In the centre of the city, cutting right across it, was the Grand Street, (al-Shāri' al-A'zam.) In that street there were the centre of police (majlis ash-Shurta), the great prison, the great mosque and the caliph's official residence - Dār al-khilāfā wa-hiya dār al-'Āmma - in which the Caliph used to meet the people on Mondays and Thursdays.² There, too, were the public and private treasuries. This same street, inhabited on both sides by civilians (al-nās) with small local markets and craft centres for daily consumption led to Khashabat Bābak,

1. A. Duri: Nushū' al-Aṣṇāf, pp. 134-7; X. de Planhol: The World of Islam, p.9.

2. H. Viollet: Description du Palais d'al-Moutasin, pp.15-26; idem: Un Palais Musulman du IXe Siècle.

the wooden frame on which Babak's body was mounted after his execution, and to the Great Market. In the Great Market, kept away from the houses, each trade had its own quarters and so had each craft.¹

In the main part of the city, that is excluding the residences of the Caliphs and other notables and government buildings, a great sense of economy prevailed in building materials, labour and designs. The houses were on the whole built of unburnt brick and a functional tendency dictated their shapes and internal divisions. This was quite in harmony with the speed in which these buildings were made, more so with the taste of their residents, the soldiers of Mu'taṣim. With the palaces and government buildings it was different, as Sāmarrā had a lot to show of the splendours and beauty of Islamic art and architecture, in what were Dar al-Khilāfa, al-'Āshiq, al-Jawsaq, al-Malwiyya, Jami' Abū Dulaf and others.² Although influenced by the styles of old Islamic cities, notably Baghdād, Damascus and Fuṣṭāt,

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1. Ya'qūbi: Buldān, III, pp. 32-4; Masūdi, VII, p. 122; Berzfeld: Geschichti der Stadt Sāmarrā, p. 106; X. de Planhol: The World of Islam, pp. 11-13.
 2. Above, p. 153, n. 2; Greswell: Early Muslim Architecture: pp. 259-67, 274-91.

Sāmarra showed something more than mere copying and thus struck an image of its own. It is true that most of this appeared in the buildings completed after Mu'tasim. But even Mu'tasim who, according to Tabari, had a craze for buildings but cared for nothing more than strength and utility in them, left a great legacy in the palaces which he built.¹

It is most important in connection with the rise of Sāmarra, especially in relation to the social, political and cultural development of the new capital, to note the policy which Mu'tasim initiated in settling the different groups of peoples. These groups were to be quite separate from one another, and in planning them the proximity of their original homes was maintained.² The Turkish troops were settled near to those from Farghana and Ushrūsana.³ These were kept quite apart from the quarters of al-Nās - a term used to mean the different civilian people who came to the new city to make its life complete with regard to social and economic

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1. Tabari, p.1326; E.M., p.130; Mas'ūdi, VII, p.104; Bar-Habraens, I, p.133; also n.2. above, p. 137.
 2. Mas'ūdi, op.cit., p.122, Ya'qūbi: Buldan, p.32-3. This was not new. Earlier cities, later ones also, had ethnic groupings. X.de Planhol: The World of Islam, pp.13-4.
 3. Mas'ūdi, op.cit., p.122, Ya'qūbi: op.cit., p.33-3.

services.¹ They were also kept apart from the Khurāsānis, who were settled with the people on both sides of the Grand Street. Even within the individual group the settlement was under different commanders like Ashinās, Khāgān 'Artūj, Waṣīf and others.² This however did not seem to have been related to tribal or regional groupings within the particular major group (Turks, Farghanis or Ushrūsanis). Nevertheless it had to do with the unity and esprit de corps within each group and explains the rivalry which developed later within the dominant group of the Turks and thereby threatened the stability of the succession to the Caliphate. More significant was the fact that Mu'taṣim had made it a clear-cut policy that each group was to marry within its own ethnic community. Ya'qūbi reports that Mu'taṣim bought Turkish slave girls and had these married to his Turkish troops and forbade these troops to marry among the Muwalladīn. He further says that Mu'taṣim fixed some payments for these slave girls and had their names in the registers

1. Ya'qūbi: Bulḍān, pp.32/3.

2. Ya'qūbi: op.cit., pp.32-4, Masūdi, Munūdj, VII, p.122.

of the Dīwāns so that it was not possible for any of their husbands to divorce or leave them.¹ Most probably the same policy was applied to the other groups, the Farghānīs, the Ushrūsanīs and the Maghārība, although it is not clear whether these three groups were also forbidden to intermarry. With the rise of Sāmarra the attention of the writers was naturally drawn to the Turks who were undoubtedly the dominant element in the army and the closest group to the Caliph Mu'taṣim, two factors which contributed to their pre-eminence in the history of the city after him.

This policy of Mu'taṣim was a great departure from the spirit of Islam and the traditions of the Islamic Empire. Although in the Islamic cities that were founded before Sāmarra, the tribal and regional settlements of the armies were the patterns that prevailed there were no such restrictions as a policy of co-existence without mixing or intermarrying. In the early cities, Kūfa and Baṣra, when the armies were organized and led on a tribal basis, it was the tribal spirit that made

1. Ya'qūbi: Bulḍān, p.33.

the tribal grouping the basis of settlement.¹ Later on when the armies were composed on a regional basis it was the policy of the caliphs to have the different quarters so arranged that they could use one group against the other in case of need, as was the case in the settlements of Baghdād. But in all these places social, cultural and racial mixing soon produced a well-knit society despite economic and social variations. The historical circumstances together with economic and social conditions which favoured this must not be ignored. Unlike Baghdād, Sāmarra had no Kūfa or Baṣra in its hinterland, nor had it in the nascent spirit of the Abbasid Revolution (which for the common purpose of economic and social equality with Muslim ideals brought the different elements together) as a moving force in shaping its destiny. If anything it had come in a period which marked the end of the popular zeal for the caliphs and the Caliphate.² The fate of these had now become a matter of military power based on professional soldiers.³

1. C. Pellot: Le Milieu Basrien, pp. 21-34.

2. Gibb, Government and Islam, p. 122; Chapter I above.

3. Jāhiz, Manāqib, p. 45.

The reasons for Mu'taṣim's policy are thus not so difficult to find. Now that the perpetuation of the Caliphate was dependent on military power, Mu'taṣim saw in the preservation of his troops separate and ethnically pure the safeguard for his future and that of his successors.¹ The maintenance of the military spirit among these troops by keeping them away from any civilian influence was moreover a vital necessity for a Caliph who had to defend his realm against a series of serious revolts. If the Abbasid Caliphate was in a state of slow expansion in the East with the Tāhirids, it was in a state of defence in those parts which were directly under the rule of the Caliph, in Irāq, Syria, Armenia and Egypt.

The age of the military men, as has been suggested, was a result of previous developments, notably those in the reign of Ma'mūn.² Ma'mūn's men were, however, the direct or indirect products of the traditions of Baghdād. They were not alien to the sentiments and the thinking of the people to whom they belonged. Ashinās, Itākh,

1. It is not clear from where Mu'taṣim had this idea of ethnic purity.

2. See Ch. 1, above.

Wazīf and Sīma of Damascus, were amongst these having been bought in Baghdād.¹ To these generals the caliphs, the Caliphate and the people had their own sanctity and respect. It is significant that during their period of power, under Mu'tasim and Wāthiq, they served all of them very well. Even Afshin and Māziyār who fell foul of Mu'tasim were a part of this tradition and belonged to a class - like the Tāhirids - which combined the ability of the general with the ambitions of the statesman. With the rise of Sāmarra a new tradition was begun; a tradition in which the character of Mu'tasim, the nature of his troops and the events of his reign all played parts. The new generals who were to rise to power in the garrison atmosphere of Sāmarra with its social division, its military spirit and rivalries and jealousies of the different commanders and the groups, were ones who saw no further than the immediate use of power and pay. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the Abbasid administration in the central regions under the caliphs was shaken and the power and financial resources

1. Ya'qūbi, Buldān, pp. 29-30.

of the caliphs were diminishing with the rise of strong regional dynasties. What is more the Abbasid dynasty had the curse of a succession of weak Caliphs for a long period after al-Wāthiq, (227-32/842-47).

With the efforts of Mu'taṣim and some of his successors, notably his son al-Mutawakkil, Sāmarrā grew rapidly into a big city surpassing Baghdād in the spread of its buildings and drawing to it all sorts of peoples with different crafts and trades.¹ Having finished with the planning and the laying of the foundation of the buildings on the eastern bank of the Tigris, where the city was located, Mu'taṣim erected a bridge to the western side of the river. There he embarked on a programme of development giving each commander a part to look after. Palaces with terraces - majālis -, ponds and squares, fruit gardens and crop fields soon grew up to attract the attention of the notables whose competition "to acquire even the smallest plots of land made the price of land rise considerably."² Palm trees from Irāq, seedlings of fruit trees from

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1. Ya'qūbi: Buldān, p.38; Masūdi, VII, p.122; N.Thābit, al-Jundiyya, p.35.
 2. Ya'qūbi; op.cit., pp.38-9; Ibn Hawqal: al-Masālik, pp.166/7.

Mesopotamia, Syria, Al-Jibāl, Rayy and Khurāsān, together with the people to look after them were transported to the new capital. And so was the case with the different crafts; "paper makers from Egypt, glass makers, potters and carpet-makers from Baṣra, cloth-makers and oil-makers (Adhān) from Kūfa, water-engineers and others of different crafts and trades" were settled in the new city.¹ The plants and crops grown in a rich soil left fallow for years, and the trades and crafts encouraged with the needs of a growing city and the necessities and fruits of a reign of campaigns flourished to such an extent that many people sought their fortunes in the new capital.² The water-front on the Shāri' al-Khaliḥ - the Bay Street - was busy with the activities of merchants and the arrival of barges and boats loaded with different merchandise from Baghdād, Wāsiṭ, Kaskar, Baṣra, Ubulla, Ahwāz, Moṣul, Ba'arbāyā, Diyār Rabī'a and their hinter-lands.³ The proximity of Sāmarrā to Meṣūl, Ba'arbaya and

1. Ya'qubi: Bulḍān, p.39.

2. Ya'qubi: op.cit., p.6; Masūdi, VII, p.122.

3. Ya'qubi: op.cit., p.38; Sāmarrā was about 120 km. from Baghdād. B. Francis & M. Ali: Jāmi' Abi Dulaf, p.60. N. Thābit, al-Jundiyya, p.35.

Diyār Rabi'a - making for direct contact between producer and consumer - was a great influence in the rise of the prices of cereals, notably wheat, in favour of the producers in these places.

With the rapid development, these activities and that flourishing of the state of affairs, Sāmarra - so called after the name of the city that was once built by Sam, son of Noah as the tradition goes - was soon called Surūr man Ra'ī - the delight of him who saw (it). That name was in turn shortened to Surra man Ra'ā - he who saw it was delighted. Finally it was nicknamed Sa'a man Ra'ā - (the sight) grieved him who saw (it).¹ Having maintained the rapid development under the reign of Mutawakkil, the pace slowed in the time of his son al-Muntasir and declined in the reign of al-Must'in.² Its fate was reflected in its different names, closely connected with the fate of the Abbasid Caliphate then growing weaker and weaker with the interference of the Turkish troops and the growth of strong regional governors.³

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1. Mas'ūdi: Tanbih, p.357; idem: Murūdj VII, pp. 121-2; Yaqūt: Buldān, III, pp.14-16.
 2. Yaqūt: op.cit., p.19.
 3. Ibn Badrun, p.292; D.Sourdel: Le Visirat Abbaside, II, pp.245-6.

Unlike Baghdād, whose population and economic and social growth enabled it to bear, though not without occasional loss, the fluctuations in the political fate of the Caliphate, Sāmarra, mainly a garrison, could not weather the political storms that raged in it without complete decline, the more so as Baghdād, a great rival, was close at hand.

Even at the time of its rapid growth and power, under Mu'taṣim and Wāthiq, Sāmarra seemed to have been living in a different cultural world from that in Baghdād. With the flourishing of learning and science so marked at that period and so directly influenced by Mu'taṣim's predecessor Ma'mūn, Sāmarra's atmosphere at that time was one of trials and executions - Afshīn and Maziyar - and of campaigns. Though that period had amongst its poets, Abū Tammām,¹ Di'bil and al-Buḥtri, amongst its writers and thinkers al-Jahiz and amongst its traditionists Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, none of these had an incentive to live in Sāmarra or be connected with its court and politics except al-Jahiz and that for political and sectarian reasons. Even one like the singer al-Moṣuli

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1. Abū Tammām had certainly praised Mu'taṣim on more than one occasion. So did other poets of minor repute. But the wanderings of Abū Tammām and the persons who were the subjects of his praise show how Sāmarra was rivalled politically and culturally in more than one centre in the Caliphate. See Najīb Muḥammad al-Bahbiti: Abū Tammām, Hayātuhu wa-Hayātu Shi'rihi.

whose place should have been the court could not stay in Sāmarrā.¹ With the caliphs and the Caliphate under the power of the professional soldiers, the affairs of State fell in the hands of the scribes, who had a traditional enmity with the men of learning.² The latter with the bulk of the people were the alternative power upon which the Caliphs would call for support. It is worth remembering that this period was soon followed by the appearance of the great chroniclers like Ṭabari, Mas'ūdi and Ya'qūbi who, coming at the end of the political unity and strength of the Caliphate, reflect a sense of a glorious past that they were so anxious to record and tell their people about. Their period in its turn was followed by that of regional historians when the division of the Caliphate had become a fact.³ It is equally interesting to note that Baghdād, to whose glory and power the former school of

1. Aghani, Vol.V. pp. 93-4.

2. See Jahiz, Dhamm Akhlāq al-Kuttāb; Gibb: The Social Significance, pp.105-15; Muntaḡayat, p.95.

3. This evolution could be sensed in literary works too. al-Mutanabī's poetry and career reflect a hankering for glory and power that were once the lot of Caliphs - and prophets - which he felt he deserved. al-Mu'arri's on the other hand reflect a disillusionment in all these, and in religion too.

writers always referred was often called madīnat al-Salām - the City of Peace - while Sāmarra was often referred to as al-'Askar, the Camp.¹

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1. Mas'ūdi: Tanbih, p.357; Yaqūbi: Buldān, III, p.23: al-Muhabbar, p.376. To the 'Askar are related some of the 'Alīd Imams who lived there and are referred to as al-'Askarriyyūn. See Yaqūbi above and Abū al-Ferāǧ, Maqātil al-Talibiyyīn, p.385.

CHAPTER V

The Major Events of the Reign

Mu'taṣim was not a great caliph. He was however a competent general. His reign could not be called glorious especially when compared to that of his father al-Raṣhīd or his brother and predecessor al-Ma'mūn. But it was eventful. To the chroniclers it was a series of continuous campaigns.¹ His victories in these campaigns were not conquests. All the same they were important. While ridding the Caliphate of a number of serious revolts, these campaigns had helped to confirm the ascendancy of the Generals, especially the Turkish generals around Mu'taṣim, and while helping regional governors, like the Tahirids in Khurāsān and the Aghlabids in North Africa, to consolidate their dynastic power in their regions they also helped to preserve the status quo between the Caliphate and the Byzantine Empire.

With the details of these events in early Arabic

1. Mas'ūdi: Tanbih, pp. 355-6; Dīnawarī: Akhbār, pp. 396-7; Ibn Qutaiba; al-Ma'ārif, pp. 199-200; Ibn al-Faḥīh; Buldān, pp. 52-3. Tabari's accounts of the reign are translated by E. Marin under the title: The Reign of al-Mu'taṣim.

sources like Ṭabari, Ya'qūbi, Dīnawarī, Mas'ūdi, and with the many studies¹ on these events, it is unnecessary to treat them at length here. It is sufficient in surveying them briefly to bring out their particular points of interest as well as their significance for the trends of development in the Abbasid world.

Perhaps the most important of these events was the revolt of Bābak the Khurramite of Badhdh.² Having raged for about 18 years before the accession of Mu'tasim and threatening the political economic and geographical integrity of the Caliphate it threatened the Caliphate on yet another plane - Religion.³ For Bābak was not merely a political and military rebel. He was the head of an important sect, the Khurramite. In his bid for power Bābak benefitted from the previous politico-religious turmoil which was the mark of that region of al-Badhhdh since the advent of Islam in those regions and especially after the demise of Abu

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1. General Works like Dūri: al-'Aṣr al-'Abbasi al-Awwal; Muir: Caliphate; Vasiliev; Byzance et les Arabes, I; Khuḍari; Muḥaḍarāt; H.I. Hasan; Tarikh al-Islam. Other references are quoted in dealing with the individual subjects.
 2. Qalqashāndi; Subh, VI, pp. 400-2; E.M. Wright: Babak of Badhhdh and al-Afshin; E.G. Browne: Literary History of Persia, pp. 323-8; B. Spüler: Geschichte der Islamische Länder, pp. 57-8; idem: Iran, pp. 61-3; G.H. Sadighi; Les Mouvements, pp. 187-228, 229-80.
 3. Ṭabari, p.1171; E.M. p.8; Mas'ūdi; Tanbih, p.353.

Muslim al-Khurāsāni.¹ He also benefitted from the political situation of his time. While the hold of Islam as a religion and of the Caliphate as a political power had always been precarious in its eastern provinces, the reign of Ma'mūn was a period in which the Caliphate was at a particular disadvantage with the revolts in Iraq, Syria and Egypt and with a series of Byzantine campaigns.² It was however not these factors alone which helped and sustained Bābak's revolt. There were economic factors as well. It is known that for a number of reasons the Muslims had to maintain the economic and social structure in which they found Sassanid Persia, where there was a majority of poor peasants and a minority of rich landlords and Dīqāns.³ The poor peasantry had always been prone to such revolts, which while claiming salvation in the after-world on the religious side promised material well-being in this world. Bābak's revolt was one of these.

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1. See Barthold: Turkistan; Browne: Literary History of Persia; Gibb: The Arab Conquests in Central Asia; Ibn Isfandiyyār: History of Tabaristan.
 2. Ibn Qutaiba refers to the revolt of Ḥātim b. Harthama, whose father was killed by Ma'mūn, in Armenia, and his inciting neighbouring governors to rise against Ma'mūn. He goes on to say that it is said that that was the cause of Babak's revolt. Ma'ārif, p.198.
 3. Lambton: Landlord and Peasant, pp. 16-7.

It is difficult to be exact about the origin and ideas of Bābak.¹ Ṭabari is almost silent about them. Dīnawarī expresses his difficulties on these points. To the best of his knowledge Bābak was a descendent of Faṭīma the daughter of Abū Muslim al-Khurāsānī.² He hastens to say that it was to this Faṭīma, from whom also the Faṭimiyya sect descended, to whom Bābak was related and not to Faṭīma the daughter of the prophet, a fact which shows that some people had assumed the latter. Bala'mi says that Bābak's teaching allowed all that Islam forbade and was a doctrine of communism which left nothing private.³ Elsewhere one learns that he claimed that the spirit of Jawīdān, a former religious rebel leader with whom Bābak was brought up had passed onto him.⁴ This claim was endorsed by Jawīdān's widow, whom Bābak married. In this way Bābak was able to get the support of the followers of Jawīdān and lead this sect. Ṭabari says that on his capture Bābak was paraded before some of the Muslim women whom he had kept in captivity. On seeing him in that situation the women started to weep and cry. Asked why they did so they answered that

1. See p. 151 n. 2.

2. Dīnawarī: Akḥbār, p. 397.

3. Bal'amī, IV, p. 525.

4. E.M. Wright: Bābak of Badkḥdḥ.

he used to treat them well - kāna yuhsinu alainā - most likely a reference to the material conditions in which he kept them.¹ It was upon all these factors, religious, political and economic, that the revolt took place. And while benefitting from the troubles of the Caliphate at that time he had the great advantage of being at home in an area of mountains, forests and valleys with cold winters, an area which by virtue of its geography proved the greatest obstacle to the advance of the Arabs and the Islamic Empire.² Strongly entrenched in his centre of al-Badhāh with a number of garrison fortresses, with local support, local alliances or benevolent neutrality, he was able to harass the neighbouring Arabs and interrupt the supplies sent for the outposts of the Caliphate. His supporters also made use of the proximity of the Byzantine borders in Armenia where they were sure of help and refuge.³ This position of strategic importance across lines of communications and so near to Byzantine borders added to his danger and made difficult the task of suppressing the revolt.

Ma'mūn, busy elsewhere, did not give the revolt his full attention. He however did not fail to send successive

1. Tabari, p.1128; E.M., p.51.

2. See p.2 n.3. 152 n.1.

3. Tabari, p.1171; E.M., p.8; Mas'ūdi; Tanbīh, p.169.

expeditions against Bābak one of which was led by 'Abd Allah b. Tāhir governor of Khurāsān.¹ In that campaign Muḥammad b. Ḥamīd al-Ṭūsi al-Ṭā'ī died.² These did not meet with success and with the continuous attacks from Bābak the toll of Muslim losses mounted.³ It seems that the successes of Bābak coupled with the ineffective measures of the Caliphate against him helped to gain him more supporters. In this way he was able to maintain his revolt throughout the reign of Ma'mūn, from the start of the revolt in 201/816-7.

In the year of the accession of Mu'taṣim 218/833-4 Bābak drew to his side a great number of followers from the Jibāl region from the areas of Hamadhān, Ispahān, Masabadhān and Mīhrifanqāḍāq. These, according to Ṭabari, joined the Khurramite religion, joined forces, and camped in the district of Hamadhān.⁴ Luckily, Mu'taṣim, with the cessation of the Byzantine campaign begun by Ma'mūn, could afford to turn his attention to Bābak. Towards the end of that year he sent an expedition led by Ishāq b.

1. Ṭabari, p.1233; E.M., p.56; Dīnawarī; Akhbār, p.397.

2. He was the subject of a famous poem by Abu Tammām in which amongst other things individual heroism is highly praised. Dīnawarī: Akhbār, p.398; Muntaḡayāt, pp.99-102.

3. Ṭabari, p.1233; E.M., p.56; Mas'ūdī, Tanbih, p.353, Dīnawarī: Akhbār, p.397; Ibn al-Faṭīh: Buldān, p.52; Bar Hebraeus, I, p.136.

4. Ṭabari, p.1165; E.M., p.2.

Ibrāhīm b. Muṣ'ab who was named by him governor of the Jibal region.¹ The expedition met with some success. However with the increasing danger of the Zuṭṭ revolt, so close at hand, Mu'taṣim had to turn his attention for a while thither.² The campaigns against Bābak were not stopped but dragged on, on a small scale for the year in which the Zuṭṭ revolt occupied the Caliph's attention. In that year Mu'taṣim's men facing Bābak were able to gain some valuable information about the topography of the area and the power and location of Bābak and his troops. That information was gained from some of Bābak's men either captured or won over by various means. By the year 220/835 the Zuṭṭ revolt was over. The fortifications damaged by Bābak in the area between Ardabīl and Zinjān were put in working condition and manned. The routes between were garrisoned and trenched to protect the movement of supplies and troops. The grip of government was gradually tightening on the situation. This, as Ṭabari says,³ was the first victory achieved against Babak. It was indeed a turning point. The major campaign was at hand. In that same year, 220/835, Mu'taṣim made Afshān

1. Ṭabari, p.1165; E.M., p.2.

2. See below p.162.

3. Ṭabari, p.1171; E.M., p.9.

governor of Jibāl and gave him supreme command of the campaign against Bābak.

Starting from the Prayer-place in Baghdād Afshīn moved on to make his head-quarters at Barazand.¹ At once one notes that a new plan was evolved. The war against Bābak was no longer a series of expeditions but a major campaign. The strategy, summed up in Afshīn's words "staying in the place you need is better than fighting for the place you do not need,"² was to advance slowly to the Bābak's place to contain him and his troops, and to force him to a decisive battle, making sure of the safety of the supply line and the relation between the different garrisons and the major base - at Barazand - which was in turn in continuous contact with the Caliph Mu'taṣim in his capital. This was the strategy which had been followed in the campaign against the Zutt. The part played by the Caliph Mu'taṣim in these two major campaigns, in which he did not take the field, is very important. In both he took direct interest, and in the strategy for both he was behind the policy of continuous supply and relief, of campaigns instead of expeditions and the moral backing given to commanders and

1. Tabari, p.1170; E.M., p.8.; Dinawari: Akhbār, p.398.

2. Tabari, p.1208; E.M., p.37.

troops.¹ In both of these campaigns one notes the great use of horse for the movement of men and supplies and in the field. This should not cast any doubt on the ability of such tried generals as 'Ujaif and Afshīn. In the case of Bābak the choice of Afshīn could not have been bettered by the choice of any other commander. He knew the region and the brunt of the campaign fell on his own men who were better led by him.

The campaign dragged on till the last 3rd of the year 222/837. In that period the men experienced the problems of long campaigns in the difficult climatical conditions of rainy and cold winters. With the problem of supply which, though kept flowing from Mu'tasim and led by some of his Turkish generals like Bugha and Ja'far b. Dinār, was often interrupted by Bābak's men, there was the problem of discipline of an army composed of different elements and kept for a long time in difficult conditions without serious engagement. With Afshīn's men from Ushrūsana and the Maghariba there were some Abna', Turks and some of the unruly volunteers (mutatawwi'a).² And friction did arise but was met by the resolution of Afshīn

1. Tabari, p.1326; E.M., p.130; Ibn Hamdun: Tadhkira, pp. 105-5; Ibn al-Faqīh: Buldān, p.52.

2. Tabari, p.1208; E.M., p.37.

who had the full backing of Mu'taṣim. With the use of strong fortifications, trenches, a strong supply line, a system of intelligence, a policy of winning over Bābak's supporters and the local elements all made with continuous vigil and strict discipline, Afshīn was at last able to contain Bābak in his fortified capital of Badh^hdh and give him no alternative to a showdown. This came after long waiting and continuous negotiations for surrender. For Afshīn's men this was after a slow march of about 4 miles¹ a day, with day and night shifts, men on the backs of their animals and surrounded by guards. Moving to the beats of the drums in close formation, the men were under strict orders not to exceed or fall short of their marching commands.² Then followed the battle, a severe battle, in which the strong fortifications of Bābak and the gallantry of his men were of no avail. al-Bad^hdh was at last conquered, and Bābak defeated. But despite the efforts of Afshīn to close all the routes of escape with his men, Bābak was able to flee by evading these and slipping away with some of his men to a valley leading to Armenia. Afshīn, however, now that he had achieved his

1. 1 arabic mile = 1 1/4 English mile.

2. Tabari, p.1203; E.M., pp.33-4.

victory and established his power over the Jibāl region as governor of Mu'taṣim, was able to send commands to the Armenian governors and Patriarch announcing the flight of Bābak and asking them to look out for him.¹ Meanwhile there arrived a writ of Amān (safe conduct) sealed in gold from Mu'taṣim to Bābak. This was not to the liking of Afshīn.² However he communicated the safe conduct offer to Bābak through some of the latter's followers. Bābak refused the offer and went to Armenia to settle with a certain Sahl b. Sanbat in his castle. The latter betrayed him to the agents of Afshīn.³ Also betrayed was the brother of Bābak, 'Abd Allah. With the situation in the Jibāl area so well in the hands of Afshīn the Armenian rulers had every reason to please their new powerful neighbour.

Mu'taṣim, in his new capital Sāmarra, kept in touch with the development of the situation. After the victory over al-Badhḥ, the defeat and arrest of Bābak, and the freeing of the prisoners which he had kept in his castles, Afshīn marched with the army back to Samarra.

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1. Ṭabari, p.1219; E.M., p.44; Dīnawarī: Akhbār, p.400; Bar Habrneus, I, p.136.
 2. Ṭabari, p.1220; E.M., p.45.
 3. Ṭabari, p.1225-6; E.M., p.50; Bar-Habraeus I, p.136.

With him were the important captives, Bābak, his brother 'Abd Allah, and some others. Mu'taṣim was eager to celebrate the victory, to shower gifts on his victorious commander Afshīn, and to reward his troops. On approaching Samarra Afshīn was met by Harūn al-Wāthiq, son and successor of Mu'taṣim, together with other members of the Caliph's house.¹ Before his trial Bābak was paraded on an elephant in the streets of Sāmarrā.² After being tried and killed in a most savage manner, his body was fixed to a post which became one of the land marks of the new capital - Khashabat Bābak. Bābak's head was sent to Khurāsān to be exhibited there too.³ Afshīn was crowned by Mu'taṣim who, giving him two bands of jewels, also gave him 10 million dirhems for himself and as much for his men. He moreover appointed Afshīn governor of Sind and called upon the poets to praise Afshīn, promising them rewards.⁴

So ended the revolt of Bābak. But the Khurramiyya sect was by no means completely crushed. Some of Bābak's

1. Tabari, p.1229; E.M., p.53.

2. Ibid. p.1230; E.M., p.53-4.

3. Ibid. p.1231; E.M., p.54. Abū Tammām: Muntaḡayāt, p.88; Tanukhi: Nishwar, I, p.75; al-Muḡabbar, p.489. Bābak's brother 'Abd Allah was crucified in Baghdād. His head was also sent to Khurāsān.

4. Tabari, p.1233; E.M., p.57; Dīnawarī: Akhbār, p.400.

followers had already sought refuge in the Byzantine Empire and were found fighting with the Byzantine Emperor in his campaigns against Mu'taṣim. According to some sources Bābak himself had promised to embrace Christianity and take with him his followers to that religion, when he was seeking help in his last days.¹ For those who were left, the basic economic grievances which had driven them to his fold were hardly ameliorated. The grip of the government was tightened with the defeat of Bābak and new measures initiated for strengthening its outposts in the area. But the spirit of revolt was soon to express itself not far away, in the revolt of Maziyyār, who was said to have been in league with Bābak.²

Like the revolt of Bābak the affair of the Zuṭṭ had begun in the reign of Ma'mūn and profited from his engagements in the north. Like it too the Zuṭṭ had benefited from their geographical situation in the marshy lands and rivulets in the area of Baṣra. And if the revolt of Bābak was one of a chain of revolts, the Zuṭṭ revolt too, was but the forerunner of the revolt of the Zanj.³ Here

1. Vasliev, I, p.137.

2. See below, p.41: 188.

3. Cf. E.I. s.v. Zanj; Noeldeke: Sketches.

however the problem was one of food, an economic problem manifesting itself in brigandage for the acquisition of the necessities of life. In this aspect it was like the many similar affairs of the Arab nomads who harrassed the caravans or raided cities, or even like the looting and stealing which was the fate of Baghdād in the chaos which prevailed in the city during the siege and murder of Amin. In both revolts of the Zutt and the Zanj the nomadic Arab element was not lacking.

The Zutt were originally a people of Indian origin, mainly from the Sind area, introduced to the region of Kaskar by al-Hajjāj, the famous Umayyad governor, probably to inhabit the countryside and help to reduce the problem of the loss of man-power created by the flight of peasants to the towns.¹ They were herders of buffalo and according to Mas'ūdi it was to them that the introduction of that animal in Syria was attributed. Both groups of Zutt increased in number and attracted others in time, meanwhile spreading over the area of the Baṭīḥa. However the Zutt who harrassed the trade routes at the time of Ma'mūn and Mu'taṣim were not alone. With time they mixed with other peoples of different origins but of similar social standing.²

1. Balādhuri: Futūh, IV, p.525; Mas'ūdi: Tanbīh, p.355.

2. Balādhuri: 'Ibar, III, p.257; Pellat: Le Milieu Basrien, pp. 37-40; E.I. s.v. Zutt, Luli and Nuri.

Slaves and mawālī¹ of Bahila and other Arabs are mentioned amongst them. It was indeed these latter, according to al-Balādhuri, who encouraged them to rob and defy authority, since before then they used to ask for petty things or to take the opportunity of the negligence of ships' hands and secretly steal."

⊗ Taking advantage of the nature of the marshy land which was a good ground for retreating, their knowledge of the use of small craft, and the fact that the merchant barges were usually not properly guarded, they progressed from begging to stealing, from stealing to waylaying, and from waylaying to cutting the supplies from Baṣra to Baghdād, and thus openly defying the State.¹ The climax of this had come at the accession of Mu'taṣim, who had already given his attention to the revolt of Bābak. The cutting of supplies to Baghdād was however a matter that afforded no delay.² A campaign was planned. Its leader was 'Ujāir b. 'Anbasa, a veteran general of Ma'mūn and one of the leaders of the vain attempt for the succession of

1. Tabari, pp. 1167, E.M., p.4-5. The Zutt were led by a certain Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān helped by another called Samlaq who organised the military side of the movement. Ibn al-Athir, VI, p.313, and Ibn Khaldūn, III, p.257, give the name Sammaḡ for Samlaq but otherwise they depend on Tabari's version.

2. Balādhuri: Futūḥ, IV, p.526.

'Abbās son of Ma'mūn. Did Mu'taṣim want to keep him busy but not out of reach for some time? He did not show any sign of a desire to rid himself of the old general. He spared no effort to make him succeed in his mission against the Zutt.¹ It was here, before the campaign of Afshīn against Bābak, that one notes Mu'taṣim's tactics of a sustained campaign with the continuity of supply, direct relation between the capital and the major base, and between major base and outposts, with the use of relay horses for men and reliefs. Here too one notes the strategy of containment and the closing of the routes of flight or retreat. 'Ujāif moved to Wāṣit where he made his headquarters in a neighbouring village. From there he started to dam the outlets of the different streams which were used by the Zutt as ways for attack and retreat. This was the prelude to containing and attacking the Zutt which happened soon afterwards, and seems to have been an easy affair according to the Arabic sources. Bar-Habraeus however says that 'Ujāif's men were unable to cope with the Zutt, who excelled in fighting in small boats. 'Ujāif had

1. Ibid. Ṭabari, p.1167; E.M., p.4-5. Ya'qūbi mentions that Mu'taṣim had already sent an army led by Ahmad b. Sa'id al-Bahili, but that the Zutt defeated him. Tarīkh III, p.198.

then to use some Egyptian captives whom he had brought with him and who were used to fighting in water. It was these who defeated the Zutt according to Bar-Habraeus, a version which has no other support.¹

The campaign, which lasted for about nine months, ended in the surrender of the Zutt who, neither strong nor well organised, chose a surrender guaranteeing the safety of their persons and belongings.² 'Ujāif granted them this. Twenty-seven thousands in all they were shipped to the outskirts of Baghdād from which they entered the city in their small boats arrayed in their colourful dresses and playing their horns. Mu'tasim was in a barge to watch this parade and the populace of Baghdād observed the scene from the banks of the river. From there they were deported to the Byzantine borders.³ Their fate thence is a problem of collating different reports in the sources. Ya'qūbi reports that they were settled in Khāniqīn.⁴ According to Tabari they were subjected to a serious attack from the Byzantines upon their

1. Bar-Habraeus, I, p.133.

2. Tabari, p.1768; E.M., p.6, Ya'qūbi, III, p.198, Ibn Kathīr al-Bidaya, p.282.

3. Bar-Habraeus says that they were imprisoned in Baghdād and perished there; I, p.133.

4. Ta'rikh, p.198.

deportation to the borders and completely annihilated.¹ Mas'ūdi however states that there were still some in his time in the Byzantine borders.² Ibn Rosteh speaks of the existence of some of them in the Baṭā'ih area near Baṣra up to his time, which suggests that they had not been deported en masse.³ Both latter sources are more acceptable than Ṭabari, who while showing interest in the dates and general trend of events, reveals a lack of interest in checking his details. And here, as with the revolt of Bābak, neither the State nor later chroniclers showed any interest in dealing with the causes of these revolts. In this way the writers reflect their atomistic attitude to events which ceased to be of interest once they had been reported.

The Caliph, having rid himself of the menace of the Zutt, was able to turn his attention to the war against Bābak, as has been related. It is significant that although Mu'taṣim did reward the soldiers who campaigned against the Zutt as well as their leader 'Ujaif, this was

1. p.1169; E.M., p.6-7.

2. Tanbīh, p.355. Balādhuri before him says something similar; Futuh, IV, p.526. According to both of them the Zutt were partly settled in Khāniqīn and Jalūlā in the Khuṣṣāsan road and partly sent to the Byzantine borders.

3. al-'Alā'iq, p.95.

in no way similar to what he was to do with Afshīn and his men. Seeing the rewards and honour which later were the lot of Afshīn and his men 'Ujaif and his men were more embittered against the Caliph, whose succession they had tried to avert and which they were later to try to end.

Having celebrated the victory of Afshīn over Bābak Mu'taṣim found himself again faced with the prospects of a major campaign. The Byzantine Emperor Theophilos had invaded his Syro-Mesopotamian frontiers, looting, sacking, burning, killing and carrying into captivity a great number of Muslim men and women.¹ The Byzantine attack which came so close in the wake of the campaign against Bābak had indeed a lot to do with it. According to Ṭabari, Bābak, pressed by Afshīn, wrote to the Byzantine Emperor telling him that the 'King of the Arabs' - the Caliph Mu'taṣim - was then a defenceless prey as he had sent all his men, including his tailor and his cook, against him - Bābak.²

By inciting the Byzantine Emperor to attack, Ṭabari says

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1. Ṭabari, p. 1234; E.M., p.58; Masūdi, VII, pp.133/4; idem: Tamhīh, p.169; Ya'qubī, III, p.201; Ibn Kathīr: al-Bidāya, p.285; Bar-Habraeus, I, pp.135-6; Vasiliev, I, pp.139-41.
 2. Ṭabari, pp.1234-5; E.M., p.58; Ibn Kathīr, al-Bidāya, p.285. By his tailor was meant Ja'far b. Dīnār al-Khayyāṭ, by the cook was meant Ītākḥ. Ītākḥ was a cook when he was bought by Mu'taṣim. Ja'far b. Dīnār must have been a tailor before being bought. Both were generals at the time.

that Bābak had hoped to relieve the pressure on himself with the opening of a new front. But whether or not such a letter existed, whether or not the contents of that letter were as related by Ṭabari, it is certain that Bābak and the Byzantine Emperor were in some form of contact.¹ The Byzantine Emperor was certainly aware of what was going on in the domains of his arch enemy the Abbasid Caliph. His own domains were the natural refuge of the enemies of the Caliphate, as was the land of the Caliphate for his own enemies. A major revolt like that of Bābak was watched with great interest in Byzantine circles, as had been the Civil War between Amīn and Ma'mūn.² It came at a time when the Byzantine Empire had a series of problems in the West with the advance of the Muslims of Andalus and North Africa into Sicily and Crète.³ There was moreover that series of campaigns in Ma'mūn's time, which coincided with the building up of an army under both Ma'mūn and Mu'taṣim in the former's effort to revive the spirit of Jihād.⁴ The revolts of Bābak and the Zuṭṭ had helped to keep Mu'taṣim busy in Irāq. For the Byzantine Emperor/^{Bābak} offered

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1. cf. p.18 n.2. and see Vasiliev, I, p.137.

2. B. Lewis: An Arabic Account, pp.383-6.

3. Vasiliev, I, pp. 126-7.

4. See Ṭabari, Reign of Ma'mūn, and Vasiliev, I, pp. 22-123.

the possibility of a strong ally just across the borders of Armenia. There was even the possibility of the expansion of Christendom in these domains.¹ What was certain was that Bābak and his men looked for support from the Byzantine Emperor. A group of his followers as well as some of the Muḥammira rebels took part in the attack of the Byzantine Emperor against Zibātra (Zapetra).² This was but the nature and pattern of events that existed, and continued to exist along the Byzantine-Muslim frontiers till the final victory of the Ottomans over Byzantium. Although the Caliphate and the Byzantine Empire had lived side by side for more than two centuries by the time of Mu'taṣim, they were only obliged to keep the status quo for practical reasons. Their neighbourliness was always an armed and an offensive one. This manifested itself in continuous frontier disputes, rebellions, and occasional campaigns from both sides. Rebels against Emperor or Caliph were helped directly or indirectly by the other side, as neither failed to interest ^{himself} themselves in what went on in the domains of his enemy

1. Vasiliev, I, p.137.

2. Ṭabari, p.1235; E.M., p.59; Mas'ūdi; Tanbīh, p.169; Ibn Kathīr: al-Bidayā, p.285; Vasiliev, I, p.138; M.Canard, Quelques "A Côté," p.108.

par excellence. However hardly any conquests or changes in the frontiers took place. The Byzantine Empire had for a long time organized its frontiers in the east into themes. The Caliphate followed suit with the creation of the regions of 'Awāsīm (strongholds) and Thughūr (outposts), better organised from the time of Harūn al-Rashīd whose reign had seen the last peace treaty between the Arabs and the Byzantines.¹

In the reign of Ma'mūn a full cycle of these hostile relations took place. Ma'mūn himself had abrogated the peace treaty made in his father's time by helping the insurrection of Thomas the Slav against Michael II (204-14 / 820-9) which took place in Asia Minor in 207-8 / 822-3.² In helping Thomas the Slav Ma'mūn had hoped to put on the Byzantine throne an emperor of his own choice. The attempt, however, failed in 823 and with it ended the hopes of Ma'mūn. No peace was concluded as Ma'mūn rejected the offer of the Byzantine Emperor. In the year 209-10 / 825 the Arabs launched an offensive against the Byzantines on the Syro-Armenian borders but the attack was

1. Balādhuri: Futūh, II, p.176; Qudāma b. Ja'far: al-Kharāj, pp. 252-49; Khwarazmi; Mafātīh al-'Ulūm, p.144; Vasiliev, I, pp. 94-6.

2. Vasiliev, I, pp. 22-45; Idem, Byzantine Empire, I, pp. 874-6.

halted as a result of the death of its Commander. The same year saw both Ma'mūn and Michael II occupied with attackers from the West.¹ Some Andalusians landed in Egypt and Ma'mūn was able to expel them in the same year through the action of his government^{at?} 'Abd Allah b. Tahir.² The Byzantine Empire however lost Crete to them and was to lose Sicily to the Aghlabids much later. These problems together with other internal ones helped to reduce hostilities for a while. In 213-4 /829 the coasts of Asia Minor were subjected to Muslim attacks. In the same year the Muslim fleet destroyed the Byzantine one in the eastern waters of the Mediterranean. This was followed by a campaign in 214-5 /830 led by Ma'mūn himself, who could however not press his victories as he had to deal with revolts in Egypt. Bābak's revolt was^{also} gaining also momentum at that time. These events gave Emperor Theophilos (214-228 /829-42) a chance to lead an attack on Tarsūs and Maṣīṣa, a successful attack of revenge which was celebrated in the Byzantine Empire in 215-6 / 831. Ma'mūn was soon to respond with an attack which forced the Emperor to ask for peace. The offer was refused as Ma'mūn

1. Vasiliev, I, pp. 49-52; al-Kindi; al-Wulāt w'al-Qudāt, II, pp. 163-180.

2. as above.

wanted nothing less than capitulation. Ma'mūn led two other successful campaigns in the years 216-7 / 832 and 217-8 / 833. But these, as had the others, ended neither in peace nor in any change of the frontiers or the nature of the relations of the two powers. This was the background to Abbasid-Byzantine relations on the accession of Mu'taṣim. With a series of defeats and the problems in Sicily in the period 217-223 / 833-7 the Byzantine Emperor had no intention of continuing an offensive against the Abbasids. Mu'taṣim himself was busy in the east with Bābak and in Irāq with the Zūṭṭ.¹

Then came the affair of Bābak and the relations which developed between him and the Byzantine Emperor which culminated in Bābak's offer to embrace Christianity and lead his men with him, while asking the Emperor to launch an attack on the Caliphate on his side in the hope that that would relieve the pressure of Afshīn in the al-Badhdh and Bābak. The Emperor responded with the attack of 222-3 / 837 which opened a new series of campaigns.

Being one in that line of campaigns and counter-

1. Balādhuri: Futūh, III, p.296, and Ibn al-Faṭīh: Buldān, p.394, show how frontier governors of the Caliphate were lenient with their Christian subjects and neighbours at times when the Caliph was fully engaged with internal problems.

campaigns Mu'taṣim's march on Byzantine differed not in kind but in degree. Having heard of the news of the Byzantine attack and the plight of his subjects on account of it, Mu'taṣim, according to Tabari, at once sounded the alarm for mobilization and he himself mounted his horse with his battle equipment.¹ But he could hardly go to battle that way. So he held a meeting in the Dār al-ʿĀmā having called upon two judges of Baghdād and 328 of its notables to bear witness to his will (should he die in the campaign).² After that he moved to camp on the western side of the Euphrates and thus the famous Byzantine Campaign of Mu'taṣim began on 3rd of Jumādā I 223/April 1, 838.³ 'Ujaif b. 'Anbasa had already been sent with a relief expedition to Zapetra to quieten its population and meet any attack in the meantime. Mu'taṣim then proceeded with almost all the troops he could muster and an enormous amount of military equipment and supplies. According to Tabari no caliph before Mu'taṣim had taken so much equipment.⁴ With the classical military

1. Tabari, p.1235; E.M., p.59.

2. Tabari, p.1235; E.M., p.60.

3. There is general agreement on the year and the month of the beginning of the campaign, when mentioned. Tabari, p.1236; E.M., p.60; Ya'qubi, III, p.201; Ibn Qutaiba: al-Ma'arif, p.223; Mas'ūdi, VII, p.135; idem Tanbih, p.169.

4. Tabari, p.1236; E.M., pp.60-1; Ibn Kathīr, al-Bidāya, p.286.

formation used by Muslim armies Mu'taṣim began his march, Ashinās in the front, Ītākh on the right and Ja'far b. Dīnār al-Khayyāṭ on the left. 'Ujaif was not far in advance and Afshīn was yet to march from another side. The attacking army was thus made up of three main groups, one under Mu'taṣim who was the supreme commander, one under Afshīn and the last under 'Ujaif b. 'Anbasa. Before planning the march Mu'taṣim was reported to have asked about the strongest Byzantine city. The answer was that Amorium ('Ammūriya) was the strongest fortified city and was more important to the Byzantines than Constantinople itself.¹ It is to be remembered that the ruling dynasty was from that city.² Mu'taṣim then took it upon himself to wreak revenge on that city, which had not been sacked by Muslims before. The plan was to invade Byzantium from both Syrian and Mesopotamian borders. Fixing meeting points and collaborating in the dissemination of reports and the details of strategy, the army moved with frequent halts till it reached Ancora which fell to them without much

1. Tabari, p.1236; E.M. p.60; Ya'qūbī, III, p.201, describes it as 'having been one of their - the Byzantine's - great, well equipped and well manned cities', Dīnawarī: Akhbār, p.397, describes it "a smaller Constantinople."

2. Vasiliev, I, p.143.

opposition. In point of fact the section led by Afshin had already met the army of the Byzantines led by the Emperor himself and after an initial victory of the Byzantines over the infantry of Afshin, the latter's cavalry was able to rout the troops of the Emperor.¹ It is reported that Afshin had intentionally spared the life of the Emperor saying: "He is a King - kings spare the lives of one another."² This decisive battle near al-Arminiyaq, not far from the river Lamis (Halys), facilitated the advance of the Muslim armies. The Emperor could not rally his scattered troops and was in no position to give Mu'tasim a pitched battle. His plan was to defend Amaium which was a well fortified city.

With the fall of Ancora and the assembly of all his troops there Mu'tasim began his march to his goal. The same division of the troops was employed again. But now it was Mu'tasim in the centre, Ashina's on the left and Afshin on the right. (Ujaif was relegated to a minor role). The distance between Ancora and Amorium

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1. Tabari, pp. 1242-3 and 1256; E.M., pp. 65-6 and 75; Mas'udi: Tanbih, p.169, idem Murudj VII, p.136; Vasseliev, I, pp. 154-6.
 2. Mas'udi, Murudj VII, p.136; see below p.200.

was seven days' march.¹ The first to reach there was Ashinās, 6th of Ramādān 223/August 1st 838, followed by Mu'taṣim the second day and Afshin on the 3rd day. After a long seige and continuous attacks from the Muslims against the walls of the city using catapults and Greek fire the Muslims were able to effect a break in the wall of which they had previous knowledge of a weak part.² That was the prelude to the capitulation of the city which became a lonely prey to the massive attack of Mu'taṣim. The Byzantine Emperor, not having sufficient troops to meet Mu'taṣim's, had wisely stayed away.³

But Mu'taṣim's victory was not to be a final one. Just as Ma'mūn before him was deprived of a final victory because of his death, followed by the abandonment of the campaign for the problem of succession and other internal affairs, Mu'taṣim, too, had other problems. A plot against his life was revealed to Mu'taṣim soon after the fall of Amorium.

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1. Ṭabari's account on the campaign is not accurate in regard to routes. cf. Bury: Mu'taṣim's March.
 2. Ṭabari, pp. 1245-6, E.M., pp.67-8. Vasiliev, I, p.162.
 3. The Byzantine Emperor was said to have sent emissaries to the Western Christian World asking for help after the sack of Amorium. Vasiliev says that it was to ward off Muslim threats in the Western Mediterranean; p.177.

Previous and subsequent relations show that even if Mu'taṣim was not so forced to abandon the campaign no final settlement could have been reached between the Caliphate and the Byzantine Empire. At best there could have been a formal peace treaty based on the payment of tribute and release of captives which was in itself to be abrogated at the right time by either side as was the case before. There was no indication that it could have been otherwise. The tone of the whole campaign for Mu'taṣim as well as the Byzantine Emperor was one of revenge and the causing of the maximum damage possible to fortifications as well as to villages and towns and their inhabitants.¹ With this there were the freeing or capturing of prisoners and the usual plundering and looting. That much was done by Mu'taṣim, but no peace treaty was signed. From the time of his entry into Byzantine territory till his return Mu'taṣim's policy was to burn, destroy and lay waste all that he could. So did Theophilos before him. According

1. References in some sources - Mas'ūdi: Murūdj, VII, p.136 - that Mu'taṣim had intended to march on Constantinople itself after the fall of Amorium are but unsupported and late additions reflecting on the one hand the psychology of Muslim writers as regards the long cherished desire of the fall of Constantinople - cf. Marius Canard: Les Expéditions - and on the other - in this case - the magnification of the career of Mu'taṣim and of the guilt of 'Abbās. See below p.50, 181.

to Bar-Habraeus Theophilos had ~~a~~ burned, despoiled and destroyed Arabs, Christians and Jews alike.¹ In this sense the Byzantine campaign was carried to its natural conclusion. It is interesting that while there was a marked revival in the military spirit of the Caliphate there was no expressed intention of conquest. The significance of that campaign was that while intensifying the military character of the reign, it was a campaign of professional soldiers, and indeed, any sense of political power (sultān) that the Caliphate may have had on this basis, it demonstrated at the same time the dangers which surrounded the Caliphate from rival commanders and rifts between the different military groups. Had this been confined to the 'Ujaif, 'Abbās and the old guard, a solution to the problem would have been easy. But even within the Turkish group, so well treated by Mu'taṣim and so envied for that by others, there were those, who, having been jealous of the luck of some of their kinsmen, had opted to collaborate with 'Abbās and 'Ujaif against their benefactor. As Ṭabari puts it, Mu'taṣim did not believe the involvement of those commanders because of the great number mentioned.²

1. Bar-Habraeus I p. 135.

2. Ṭabari, p. 1263; E.M., p.81.

On another plane the campaign had inaugurated the era of the (baṭṭāl), the miraculous hero whose character and exploits were to be the themes of the sagas of frontier warfare against Byzantium.¹ Even the description by Tabari of some of the events of the campaign could be regarded as belonging to that type of literature. Thus Mu'taṣim was moved in response to the cry of an Arab lady who, ^{caught} in the atrocities of the Byzantine attack, had cried "O Mu'taṣim!"² Mu'taṣim then was dressed in all his military attire and would have gone alone in answer to the call but for the necessity of waiting to organize the campaign. Thus he sought also the strongest point and marched with the greatest of armies and the best of equipment. There is also the rivalry in the attack between the different groups of the army and so on.³ Individual heroism had already been the subject of a good number of Abū Tammām's poems.⁴

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1. H. Gregoire: Les Armeniens, pp. 655-7, Marius Canard: Les Expeditions, pp. 112-21; idem Les Principaux pp. 171-2, cf. E.I.(2) Dhu'l-Himma.
 2. E.M. p.59, n. 293.
 3. There is also the legendary use of the fact that he was the eighth Abbasid Caliph which brought with it a number of other things using the number eight. See below: End of the Reign.
 4. See Najīb M.M. Bihbiti: Abū Tammām al-Ta'i Hayātuhu wa-Hayātu Shi'rihi; Haq, A., The Historical Contents.

The plot to kill Mu'taṣim and replace him as caliph by 'Abbās son of Ma'mūn recalls the opposition which faced the accession of Mu'taṣim. But where 'Abbās had been an important factor in quelling that opposition then, he was now won over to the same opposition. What is more the opposition had increased its ranks. Its core however did not change but found cause to increase its discontent, to rally others around it and an opportunity to strike. Though that opposition failed in the beginning, it had made Mu'taṣim shy away from the pro-'Abbās elements in the army and in the administration too. It seemed to have caused a deep mistrust on his part of these elements. Ya'qūbi reports that he kept Ma'mūn's men in the administration only for three months and then dismissed them all.¹ One does not hear much about 'Abbās after the accession of Mu'taṣim till the incident of the plot. Indeed Wathīq, son and successor of Mu'taṣim was already emerging as heir apparent, once left in charge in Baghdād when Mu'taṣim moved to Samarra and then seen to welcome Afshīn on his return from the war against Bābak. 'Abbās, older and more experienced as a general, was not mentioned either amongst

1. Ya'qūbi III, p.197.

the military leaders or the men of the State. 'Ujaif had successfully concluded his mission against the Zutt but there was no mention of fabulous rewards or recognition as happened with Afshin. Having led the relief party in the campaign against Byzantium he was soon overshadowed by other new commanders as the campaign progressed. Even in the building of Sāmarra there was no mention of 'Abbās or 'Ujaif. Thus Mu'taṣim had all along made no effort to appease or to approach them. They were however with him in the campaign against Byzantium. And here one notes that 'Ujaif was sent with a small force in advance, a force certainly composed of his followers from amongst the Khurāsānis and the Abnā'. Was this an attempt to get rid of them or weaken their power? Were they made to take part in the campaign for fear that they might have been a danger if left behind? There are no answers to these questions in the sources but it is certain that their power was nothing compared to that of the rest of the army and hence they were safer with it. Held in suspicion 'Ujaif was not given a major command in the campaign. He was also not given a free hand with expenditure.¹ Instead it was the new elements of the

1. Tabari, p.1256; E.M., p.76.

royal corps and of Afshīn that had everything. The campaign was a chance which brought all the discontented together in time and place and gave them an opportunity of united action.

0 The plan which unfolded itself after the fall of Amorium shows that the idea of eliminating Mu'taṣim, bringing 'Abbās to power, and returning to Baghḍad from Samarra had been in the minds of the plotters for a time before the campaign.¹ That does not suggest that they had actually made such a plan, only that the idea was there. Tabari's account of the plot tells only about 'Ujaif's reasons. But why should 'Ujaif contact 'Abbās, rebuke him for his failure to stand for succession on the death of his father, have him agree to the plot of killing his uncle and the Caliph, Mu'taṣim, and have homage paid to himself if there were no previous understanding? Why should the two of them find a ready support from a large section of the army, ranks and officers, if it were not for the discontent which they knew was a good rallying

1. Tabari, p.1257; E.M., p.77. Tanūkhi: al-Faradī I, p.72, reports an estrangement between Mu'taṣim and the poet al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḍaḥḥāk caused by the latter's composition of a poem in which he praised 'Abbās and hoped that he would be caliph.

point for such a plan? The idea of returning to Baghdād, not to Sāmarra, was very significant too. Mu'taṣim had had to call upon two judges of Baghdād and some of its notables to bear witness to his will, and it was to Baghdād that the new Caliph was to go had the plot succeeded. Thus Baghdād always remained a powerful political centre in the Abbasid World and a strong rival and alternative to Sāmarra.

It is significant too that the original plan was to kill Mu'taṣim at the beginning of the campaign when he would have been more open to attack and the men would have been pleased to be spared the hazards of the campaign.¹ This confirms the nature of some of the Byzantine-Abbasid relations when campaigns had more influence on internal than on external situations. Mas'ūdi's allegation that 'Abbās had contracted the Byzantine Emperor for peace, though not supported in any other source, is not altogether inconsistent with that situation.² In one passage Tabari says that some had said, after being rebuked by Ītākḥ,

1. Tabari, p.1257; E.M., p.77, translates "the troops would rejoice at their return from the expedition". This should be "the troops - or better still the people (al-nās) - would be pleased to abandon the campaign." The scene took place at the beginning of the campaign.

2. Mas'ūdi, VII, pp.136-7.

that they would rather change sides - i.e. to the Byzantine - than suffer such humiliations.¹ More important in relation to this new era of Sāmarra was the fact that from the start there this attempt of depositing the Caliph by soldiers who pinned their hopes of betterment on the accession of rivals from the ruling dynasty. (The tradition of Baghdād in this respect was the evasion by the Caliphs of the wills of their predecessors in respect to the problem of succession), and here it should be said that the practice was established by the old elements in the army. The Turks were only to follow suit.

'Abbās had refused 'Ujaif's suggestion to act at the beginning of the march saying that he would not spoil such a campaign - Ghazw. But he agreed to the essence of the plot with the hope that it would be executed after the end of the war. In the meantime his agents went around winning supporters and having them pay homage to 'Abbās. In this way they drew to their side men from those around Mu'taṣim's favourite generals as well as Mu'taṣim himself. Tabari mentions the names of two of these generals as examples: Ashinās and Afshīn.² His

1. Tabari: p.1249; E.M., p.70.

2. Tabari: p.1257; E.M., p.77.

account makes it clear that the plan was to kill all of Mu'taṣim's favourite generals. With those who promised to carry out the killing were some from amongst Mu'taṣim's new troops, Turks where the general in question was Turk and Ushrūsānis where he was an Ushrūsāni. The plan was that these men would act upon a signal to be given when they would attack and kill the respective generals. And those responsible for Mu'taṣim would attack and kill him. But here again differences arose as to when to act. Ujaif's plan was to attack the booty, kept in one place under guard. The disturbance would attract the attention of Mu'taṣim who, it was hoped, would rush to the place thereby exposing himself. 'Ujaif had, according to Ṭabari, nominated some men to attack the booty before having the agreement of 'Abbās. On approaching him 'Abbās disagreed, preferring to attack on the homeward march. 'Ujaif's men did their part by attacking the booty. Mu'taṣim, as expected, hurried to the scene on horseback and that was the end of the matter. Nobody attacked him as 'Abbās gave no orders for the men to do so. But the event led to the revelation of the whole plot. A certain 'Amr al-Farḡhāni, one of the chief conspirators against Mu'taṣim, had already warned a young relative of his who was a member of the retinue of

the Caliph about the whole affair and asked him to keep out of danger.¹ It seems that the failure of the attempt had caused the youth to reveal to Mu'taṣim what he knew of the plot. Mu'taṣim was thus able to round up the chief conspirators one after the other. The plot failed for lack of co-ordination and indecisiveness from 'Abbās. Mu'taṣim, who was keen to know all the details of the conspiracy in order to be in a better position to deal with its makers, had this told to him by 'Abbās whom he invited for a drink, having succeeded in allaying his fears.² Mu'taṣim had the details from other sources too. After that the main figures of the plot, 'Abbās, 'Ujaif b. 'Anbasa, 'Amr al-Farghāni and others were killed in different ways with the help of the Turkish troops of Mu'taṣim. 'Abbās was then cursed in the mosques and called al-la'īn - the cursed. His full brothers were gathered together and given to Itakh who imprisoned them in his house where they died.³

While getting rid of political opponents, especially rebel leaders and conspirators, by killing them had been the practice, perhaps with some justification, the manner

1. Tabari, pp. 1258-62; E.M., pp. 77-81.

2. Tabari, pp. 1263-4; E.M., pp. 81-2.

3. Tabari, pp. 1265-8; E.M., pp. 82-5; Ya'qubi, III, p.202; Mas'ūdi, VII, p.137.

in which Mu'taṣim had done this was somewhat unique. The use of slow death with torture and mutilation which was the mark of his practice in this aspect had no parallel before in Islamic history and was contrary to the teaching of Islam. But having been introduced it had consequences: it was to be the lot of some of the Abbasid Caliphs.

The victorious return to Sāmarra from the celebrated campaign against Amorium was thus marred by the events that followed it.¹ Nor was the victory itself to produce internal stability in the Caliphate or induce the would-be rebels to heed their steps. Mu'taṣim was soon to face a great revolt in the north east.

The revolt of Māziyār b. Qārīn takes one back to the north-eastern frontiers of the Caliphate. This time to the region of Ṭabaristan where the same geographical conditions which met the Arab advance and facilitated the revolt of Bābak in the region of Jibāl prevailed.² Māziyār himself was one of the local princes of the area.³ When

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1. For Abū Tammām's famous poem on this see, Muntaḡayāt, pp.71-78.
 2. Ya'qūbi: Bulḡān, pp.53-4; Ibn Iṣfandiyār; History of Ṭabris-tān, pp. 7-14; Ibn al-Fakih; Bulḡān, p.309.
 3. Ibn Iṣfandiyār, op.cit., p.147; Inostranzev, Iranian Influence on Muslim Literature, pp. 96-8; Sadighi, Les Mouvements, pp. 60-2; Spüler, Geschichte, pp. 63-77, Brōwne, Literary History, pp. 30, E.I.(1), Mazyar.

Ma'mūn was in Marw pressing on with his policy of Islamization and/or fraternization with the neighbouring rulers, he was able to win over the father of Māziyār. Māziyār's father on his side was keen to enlist the support of Ma'mūn against rival princes from his own family. It was on the basis of this relationship that Māziyār himself came to profess Islam and secure the help of Ma'mūn who named him Muḥammad and called him the 'Client of the Commander of the Believers'. It is said that Māziyār used to call himself "muwālī" not "mawlā" - the ally not the client - of the Commander of the Believers.¹ With the support of Ma'mūn, Māziyār remained governor of his region in Ṭabaristān. As such he continued in the reign of Mu'taṣim who, like Ma'mūn, kept him in his place not so much for his loyalty and services to the Caliphate as for the practical reason of the lack of an alternative. (Both Ma'mūn and Mu'taṣim had a lot to deal with elsewhere.) For from the time of Ma'mūn, Māziyār was consolidating his own power and doing his best to further the Zoroastrian religion and stop the advance of Islam and loyal elements to the Abbasid

1. Ya'qūbi, III, p. 53; Ibn al-Faḡīh; Buldān, p.309; Ibn Iṣfāndiyar, op.cit., p.147.

Caliphate in his own domain.¹ In the reign of Mu'taṣim the problem was connected with his own attitude to the Ṭāhirids in Khūrāsān. The consolidation of the Ṭahirid's power in Khūrāsān did not seem to have been to the liking of Mu'taṣim, who, having been in estranged relations with 'Abd Allah b. Ṭāhir at the time of Ma'mūn, did not fail to express his desire to get rid of him when the time came. Māziyār, as well as his alleged collaborator Afshīn, were aware of this.² This is why Māziyār defied the practice of handing over the Kharāj - revenue - to Marw and sent it to Mu'taṣim directly.³ Mu'taṣim used to send it back to the Ṭahirids but took no action to remedy the situation. To preserve the estrangement without siding with either party played into his policy - rather imposed on him by the situation - of keeping both busy and weak. Māziyār benefitted too. The differences between Samarra and Marw gave him a chance to manoeuvre and keeping the Ṭahirids weak furthered his ultimate policy of hindering the Arab and Islamic influence from his lands, as Khurāsān

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1. Ibn Iṣfandiyār, op.cit., History of Tabaristān, pp.149-53; Ṭabari, p.1269; E.M., p.86. Here one sees some evidence may indicate that Māziyār was in league with Bābak.
 2. Ṭabari, p.1268; E.M., p.85.
 3. Ṭabari, p.1268; E.M., p.86.

was the source of both in his time.¹ The Tāhirids could not risk an open breach with either Mu'taṣim or Māziyār as that would give the two a chance to come together against them. Their policy was to mark time and opportunities and to continue pointing out to Mu'taṣim the disloyalty of Māziyār to both religion and State. The news of Māziyār's activities to that effect had been reaching Mu'taṣim, and Ma'mūn before him, for quite a long time. But Māziyār evaded all charges against himself by defending his actions and giving substance to his loyalty when in doubt, benefiting in the meantime from the balance of power and the problems of the Caliphate.²

In the year 224/830-9 however, Māziyār chose to make his final and open breach with the Caliphate. In reverting to this course some sources say that he was instigated by Afshīn, the favourite commander of Mu'taṣim. According to these sources Afshīn who knew Mu'taṣim's attitude to the Tahirids and coveted their place in Khurāsān kept instigating Māziyār, on the grounds of his sympathy with his religion and aspirations, to revolt.³

1. Tabari, p. 1274; E.M., p.90; E.M.Wright Bābak, pp.125-31.

2. Ibn Iṣfandiyār; History of Tabaristan, p.151; Tabari, p.1270; E.M., pp.86-7.

3. Tabari, pp. 1268-9; E.M., p.86; Ya'qūbi, III, p.202.

Afshīn - so the sources say - who knew that the Tahirids alone could not put down the revolt, hoped that he would be sent to put it down and in doing so be given the governorship of Khurasān.

Allying himself with the indigenous population against the Arabs and the Abnā', with the poor wage-earners against the rich land-owners, with the taxpayers against the tax-exempt - mostly merchants and citizens generally from Arab or Abnā' stock - and with the Zoroastrians against the Muslims Māziyār began his revolt by forcing the people to pay homage to him.¹ To deter his possible opponents from taking action against him, he took hostages from amongst the suspect elements. He then ordered his supporters to destroy the defences of the key cities of the area like Amūl, Sariya and Tamis.²

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1. Tabari, pp. 1269, 1273-4, 1278; E.M., pp. 86, 89-90, 93. E.M., p.93, translates: as "those who were liable to the land tax and those merchants and citizens who were not." Tabari's meaning is perhaps "... the taxed (i.e. who were actually paying tax) and the tax-exempt from the merchants and citizens." H.Ritter, Oriens VI, 1953, pp. 157-8, gives possible alternatives to some of E.M. translations of other parts. See also B. Lewis, BSOAS, 17, p.184.
 2. Tabari, p. 1275; E.M., p.90; Ibn Isfandiyār; History of Tabaristān, p.153.

Thereupon he took to the mountains leaving it to some of his followers to fortify themselves behind a wall and some trenches which they made near Tamis in the neighbourhood of Jurjān. It was thus a combination of religious, political and geographical factors which lay behind Māziyār's revolt. Of these perhaps the most important was the economic factor. It was the promises which he gave to the peasants to give to them their masters' lands that swelled the ranks of his supporters.¹ In opposition to him stood those who were economically in a good position. One also notes that all along his policy was one of amassing as much wealth as he could get, a policy which was followed by Afshīn too. The gold and silver currency of the time did not lose its value with the change of any regime and was of great importance in the commercial economy of the period. More to this was the question of the payment of the professional soldiers of the time who sold their services for direct cash payment.

The news of Māziyār's actions soon reached Khurāsān. Some of the people of Jurjān, fearing the fate of others

1. Tabari, pp. 1278-9; E.M., pp. 92-4.

before them, fled to Nīshāpūr to give the alarm to the Tāhirids. Those in their turn despatched the news to Mu'tašim in Sāmarra. A combined attack was arranged. 'Abd Allah b. Tāhir governor of Khurāsān sent an army led by his uncle al-Ḥasān b. al-Ḥusayn to attack from Jurjān. Mu'tašim sent another army led by Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mus'ab to attack from Rayy; nearly the same methods used against Bābak were used here. Among the troops he sent, Mu'tašim was careful to send the Ṭabaristāni elements led by such men as al-Ḥasan b. Qārīn al-Ṭabari.¹ These were better suited for the campaign for their knowledge of the area. These two armies under the command of al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥusayn soon went into action.

Al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥusayn having won initial victories against the rebels in the Jurjān area was soon to capture Māziyār himself. This was done by getting in touch with the cousin or perhaps the brother of Māziyār, Qūshiyār and promising to make him the governor of the area.² It is interesting to note that the Tāhirids themselves suffered from those jealousies. With al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥusayn in the Tāhirid army there was Hayyān b. Jabala a client of 'Abd

1. Tabari, p. 1276; E.M., p.91.

2. Tabari, p. 1288; E.M., p.100.

Allah b. Tāhir the governor of Khurūn^{āsān}. This Hayyān did his best to forestall al-Ḥasan in capturing Māziyār.¹ The efforts which he made in this respect give one the impression that it was not a mere rivalry between him and al-Ḥasān as military commanders, but that Hayyan was expressing his attitude a sort of rivalry which existed between his master and al-Ḥasan.

Betrayed by some of his followers as had been Babāk, Māziyār was at last caught in his mountain refuge. Al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥusayn had played upon the internal miseries and personal aspirations of some of Māziyār's family to reach that end. There was not much of the fighting or the losses which happened in the case of Bābak. Though the military side of the campaign had catered for such eventualities, the main policy of al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥusayn was to create division within Māziyār supporters, isolate him, and put an end to the revolt by capturing its leader. To facilitate that Māziyār was given promises of safety for his person, his family and his belongings. He was then sent to Sāmarra to face the Caliph Mu'taṣim.

1. Tabari, pp. 1283-5; E.M., pp. 96-8.

Tabari says that 'Abd Allah b. Ṭāhir was keen to acquire the alleged letters of Afshīn to Māziyār in which the former was said to have encouraged the latter to rebellion. Having got them 'Abd Allah had them safely delivered to the hands of Mu'tasim.¹ In Samarra Māziyār was brought to trial before a tribunal in the Dar al-'Amma. There the chief interest was to get him to confirm the accusation of participation in the conspiracy levelled against Afshīn.² Afshīn himself was by that time in prison on that charge. Māziyār however did not support the charge, which however, ought not to have been required had the alleged letters existed. Māziyār was then whipped 450 lashes, after which he drank some water and passed away in 225/839-40. His body was afterwards crucified by the side of that of Bābak, an end which did not fail to excite the imagination of some poets.³

1. Tabari, p. 1298; E.M., p.106.

2. Tabari, pp. 1303-11; E.M., p. 111-8. Here Tabari's account confirms the allegation of the correspondence between Afshīn and Māziyār. But Ya'qūbi's account, Tarīkh III, p. 203, does not. Nor does Tabari's own account in p. 1298; E.M., p. 107.

3. Bustāni: Muntaqayāt, p.88.

Again the end of this successful campaign was overshadowed by what succeeded it. With the end of Māziyār the trial and death of Afshīn was not long in following. Afshīn, called Haydar b. Ka'ūs, was accused of connivance with Māziyār and Bābak, earlier of connivance with Makinjūr one of his governors in Ushrūsana who led a revolt in the wake of that of Māziyār,¹ of amassing wealth in Ushrūsana for a future revolt, of defection from the Caliphate and most of all, with entertaining and professing anti-Islamic beliefs.² He was then put on a level with Bābak and Māziyār and even worse, owing to his position in relation to Mu'tasim. With the revolt of Māziyār and the accusations levelled against him in connection with it together with his intentions in his homelands he was not given the command against Māziyār, which he was thought to have seen as a key to all his plans. He was further relieved of his duties in the guard of the Caliph.³ Then he was put in prison and brought to trial. Here again the Tāhīrids came onto the scene. Afshīn was reported to have heard Mu'tasim

1. Tabari, p. 1301, E.M., pp. 108-9.

2. Tabari, pp. 1308-13; E.M., pp. 114-9.

3. Tabari, pp. 1303; E.M., pp. 110.

express his intention to depose the Tāhirids from Khurāsān.¹ With his position of favour with Mu'taṣim, his ability and his suitability for the governorship of Khurāsān in case the Tāhirids were to be replaced, he was said to have worked to that end. He amassed wealth in Ushrūsana to consolidate his position there. He incited Māziyār so that, he Afshīn, would be sent to put his rebellion down and then get his way to the governorship of Khurāsān. Thus, the version of Ṭabari. But one is not told how he could have achieved that end. Was it the possibility of adding to the famous victory against Bābak a victory against Māziyār? If he had been in support of Bābak and was in league with Māziyār how did he crush the former and contemplate suppressing the latter? Was he really in league or even in sympathy with both or either of them? Ṭabari's version is inconsistent in this respect. He mentions the letters sent to Māziyār but these did not appear in the trial of either Afshīn or Māziyār, for Māziyār was asked to confess to their existence. In one place Ṭabari reports say that Māziyār did not incriminate Afshīn in any

1. Ṭabari, p.1305; E.M., p.112.

confession, in another he says they did.¹ The plea of Afshīn to Mu'taṣim contained in Ṭabari shows that those accusations had no solid basis. That plea contains no request for a pardon, but refutes wicked charges and asks for justice and wise consideration.²

Indeed an earlier and more reliable source throws doubt on the alleged relations between Afshīn and Māziyār.³ This brings the matter down to the relations between Mu'taṣim, Afshīn and the Ṭāhirids on one hand and to the possibility of Afshīn's sympathies with Magian religion on the other. The collecting and sending of wealth to Ushmūsana should be seen in this light.

It was the Ṭāhirids in Khurāsān who observed his steps and reporting these to Mu'taṣim. At the time of the revolt of Māziyār which had alarmed Mu'taṣim and drawn his attention to the seriousness of the situation in the East, the Ṭāhirids had a chance to drive home their accusations against Afshīn. In this they seemed

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1. Ṭabari, pp. 1298, 1303-11; E.M., pp. 107, 111-8.
 2. Ṭabari, pp. 1315-6; E.M. pp. 121-2. The Ṭāhirids had the governorship of Baghdād and continued to play an important rôle in Irāq.
 3. Ya'qūbī, III, pp. 202-3.

to have had supporters within Mu'taṣim's close circle of men.¹ Up to then Mu'taṣim was more on the side of Afshīn, but then he had to take the necessary precautions. Afshīn was not sent to put down the revolt of Māziyār; he was relieved of his guard duties and then kept in prison pending trial. Tabari reports that before his imprisonment, when he felt the change in Mu'taṣim's attitude towards him, Afshīn planned to escape to Armenia through which he could proceed to his homeland in Ushrūsana. To execute this he planned to invite Mu'taṣim and his favourite generals to a feast in which he would offer them poisoned food and then flee. The plan did not materialize, as Afshīn was betrayed by some of his own men.

In the famous trial of Afshīn, which had all the atmosphere of the Mihna of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal before, the most important charge levelled against him was his anti-Islamic policy in Ushrūsana coupled with his own anti-Islamic practices and beliefs. For these his accusers did not fail to produce some evidence. They brought some men who bore witness to the former charge.² Material

1. Dīnawāri, Akhbār, p.40.

2. See p.5196, fn. 2 ; Paintings.

evidence was used in support of the latter. Afshīn's house was searched, where some Buddhist idols and Magian books were found.¹ The charges of conspiracy with Māziyār were of no importance in relation to those. Afshīn was indicted. He was kept in prison from which he sent his moving plea to Mu'taṣim. The plea was met with no favourable reply. Instead Afshīn was sentenced to death. His body first hung before the gate of Dār al-'Āmma, was then burnt into ashes, which were scattered in the river Tigris.² His son, the husband of a daughter of Ashīnās, was duped by a plan which secured his arrival in Sāmarra. It was feared lest he should make some trouble when he learned of the fate of his father.

The affairs of Bābak, Māziyār and Afshīn are important not only because they illustrate the ambitions of rebel leaders, but because they show the weakness of the political and military grip of the Caliphate on the eastern provinces, reveal the economic and administrative problems which lay behind these revolts, and point to the regional, ethnic and religious factors which stood in the face of Arabization and Islamization. The slow process of Walā' which

1. D.S.Rice: Paintings, pp.16-20.

2. Bustāni: Muntaḡayāt, pp.82-90.

accompanied the spread of Islam and the Arabs in the first century of Islam had brought, on the whole to those who were subjected to it, something near to complete Islāmization and Arabization. This is perhaps better illustrated in this period by the Tāharids who, despite their political ambitions, did not falter in their loyalty to Islām and to the Caliphate. With the Walā' al-Iṣṭinā',¹ which was the mark of the Abbasid period and the spread of Islam east and north of Khurāsān in this period, neither complete Islamization nor Arabization were achieved. This is better shown in the career of Māziyār who significantly chose to call himself muwālī (ally) not mawlā (client) of the Commander of the Believers. The result was the political turmoil and unrest expressed in his revolt.

These revolts demonstrate also the rivalries which existed between such men as Afshīn, Māziyār and 'Abd Allah b Tāhir and the position of Mu'tasim in relation to them and their ambitions. The trial of Afshīn had moreover showed in some degree a rift between the men of the swords (the military commanders) and the men of the pen (the secretaries). Afshīn represented the former

MAWLA

1. E.I. (1)., s.v. Walā'; also A.Amīn, Duḥā, I, pp.37-43.

group; Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Malik al-Zayyat the famous secretary and poet and Aḥmad b. Abi Du'ād represented the latter. It was the latter two who led the accusation and cross-examination of Afshīn in the trial. Before this we have seen Aḥmad b. Abi Du'ād also on the opposite side of Afshīn.¹ It was this group, with which 'Abd Allah b. Tāhir had some connection, which threw its weight against Afshīn and secured his conviction. It was this group which stood behind the severe measures in the Mihna² and having failed to carry through its policies there had found an outlet for its intentions in championing the cause of Islam and the Caliphate in the trials of Bābak, Māziyār and Afshīn.

But these were not the only events which revealed in their course the problems that faced Mu'tasim and the Abbasid Caliphate. In the year that Mu'tasim had started the campaign against Bābak he had to send an expedition to quell the disturbances caused by a group of dissidents, known as al-Muḥammira, in the Jibāl region.³

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1. Dīnawarī; Akhbār, p.401; Tanūkhī; al-Faraj, II, pp.67-9.
 2. see Chapter I above.
 3. Tabarī, p.1165; E.M.(2). Tabarī here does not give the name but speaks of the Khurramite group, followers of Bābak, who caused Mu'tasim to send Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Mus'ab against them. Ya'qūbi, Tarikh, III, p.197, speaks of the same expedition as being sent against the Muḥammira who seem to have been connected with Babak's revolt, but were not quite the same. See E.M., p.59, n. 289.

These used to attack the caravan routes in the area and thereby threatened the safety of commercial traffic and the security of the pilgrims to the Hijāz. In this way they were motivated by economic reasons like those of the Zutt but unlike the Zutt they had the advantage of being on the frontiers and were always able to slip away into Byzantine territory. Like some of the supporters of Babak they fought with the Byzantine Emperor against the Arabs in his attack on Zapetra and in the campaign that followed it. Similar to their disturbances were those of the Kurds in the Mosul region.

More important than these was perhaps the bid for an 'Alid Caliphate led by the 'Alid Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim known as Ṣāḥib al-Ṭāliqān in the year 219/834-5¹ and the revolt of the Yemenite Alī Ḥarḥ the 'Veiled One'² in Palestine in the year 227/841-2. One of the reasons for the latter is interesting as it points to some of the excesses of the Turkish soldiers of Mu'taṣim and a practice already deplored by the Baghdādīs.³ Neither of

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1. Tabari, pp.1165-6; E.M. pp.3-4, Abū al-Faraj; Maḡātil al-Ṭalibiyyīn, pp.376-82; al-Baghdādī; al-Farq bayn al-Firaq pp.22-3.
 2. Tabari, pp. 1319-21; E.M., 124-5.
 3. Tabari, p.1219; E.M., 124; see above Chapter IV, p.125 .

these constituted a threat to the Caliphate nor was difficult to suppress. The former was put down by the Tāhirids, the latter by a commander of Mu'taṣim called Rāfiq al-Ḥaḍari. Happening within the Caliphate - not on the borders or in the newly acquired areas - their importance lies in their comparison with the other revolts. The common denominator of all was the economic factor, especially as regards the ranks of the supporters of these risings. While one of the supporters of the Ṣāhib al-Ṭalīqān was reported to have bluntly professed to him that he was interested only in material gains,¹ the supporters of the 'Veiled One' were from amongst the nomads and agrarian elements of Palestine who hoped for material justice out of his uprising.² This was in common with the revolt of the Zutt, of Bābak, of Māziyār and indeed the supporters of 'Abbās. It is interesting to note here that according to the practice and theory of the State, the nomads unlike the urbans had nothing from the Fay' (Income) of the State,³ as their names were not in the Dīwāns. These two uprisings had in common

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1. Abū al-Faraj: Maḡātīl, p.377.
 2. Tabari, p.1320, E.M., pp.124-5.
 3. Ibn Sallām: al-Amwāl, p.212.

with the others the religious aspect. But the difference was that here they were not anti-Islam but anti-'Abbāsīd. The 'Alīd rebel - a Jārūdite that is a follower of a section of the Zaidites with marked Mu'tazilite tendencies¹ - rose not so much on the claim of lineage as on his claim to bring about justice, equity and the rule of Islām. The Veiled One rose in the name of al-Amr bi-al-Ma'rūf w-al-Nahy 'an al-Munkar (commending the Right and forbidding the Wrong.)² With both these uprisings the idea of the Messiah, the Mahdī prevailed. The Veiled One called himself to some of his supporters, the Expected Sufyānī (Umayyād),³ the 'Alīd rebel was to some of his followers the Expected 'Alīd Saviour.

9 Mu'tasim was able to put down all of these minor and major revolts. All the same, the result was not the strengthening of either Caliph or Caliphate. In their different courses these events had shown the nature of the Byzantine-Abbasid relations (the sack of Zapetra and Amorium), the problems of the Abbasid Caliphate in

1. See p.50., n.

2. Accepted as a duty of every good Muslim, the principle had been used in almost all revolts as their religious basis and as a slogan to rally people round.

3. Pro-Umayyād feeling was still strong in Syria. See above Chap.I. Ibn 'Asākir, Tarīkh Dimashq, I, pp. 604-5, gives some of the traditions connected with the Sufyānī, Balādhuri, Futūh III, p.296, refers to revolt in Syria, by an Umayyād client.

the difficult frontier provinces in a vast empire (Bābak and Māziyār), the economic and social conditions which forced some of the elements to rise up against the State (the Zutt, the Kurds and others) and the internal political problems which caused the plots against the life of the Caliph or the State ('Abbās and Afshīn). In all these were reflected the weakness of the hold of the State in the various regions, the slender tie of loyalty of governors, commanders, as well as public to the Caliph or Caliphate at the time. The division between State as represented in the official organs of the Caliphate of civil and military services, and the body of the rest of the citizens, was a glaring fact. At that time when the administration was both inefficient, weak and static, the Caliphate needed to emphasize its *raison d'être* for both public and government alike. Hence there was the religious policy expressed in the Mihna, the trials of Bābak, Māziyār and Afshīn, and the flourishing of the spirit of Jihād as represented in Ma'mūn's and Mu'tasim's attitudes to the Byzantines. This was the crisis which was to find expression in the writings of Mawardi on the necessity of the Caliphate

sometime later.¹

One also notes that for Mu'tasim it was only the question of crushing the revolts that counted. The end was the change of governors but not the remedying of the situations that caused the problems. No change of administration to cope with the situation was made. This is also reflected in the attitude of the writers who failed to see the real causes in the welter of events they recorded.

The two groups which benefited from these events were the Tāharids in Khurāsan and the Turks in Sāmarra. The Tāharids had now a free hand in Khurāsan with no rival in the near provinces² and with the power of the Caliph much reduced after the deaths of Māziyār and Afshīn. The Turkish generals, ever close to Mu'tasim, were by now, by that quick process of elimination, his only favourites and the only power in the army on which he could depend. No wonder then that while Afshīn's sun was setting that of Afshinās was reaching its zenith.

1. Cf. Gibb: Studies, pp. 151-64.

2. Ibn al-Faḡīh: Buldan, p.319, here he reports the death of Māziyār and adds that 'Tabaristān was conquered, to be governed by 'Abd Allah b. Tāhir and Tāhir b 'Abd Allah after him."

The same year which saw the imprisonment of Afshīn, saw Afshīnās deputize for Mu'taṣim when the latter went to al-Sinn. In the same year too, Mu'taṣim had Ashinās put on a chair and crowned.¹ In the next year, 226/840-1, Ashinās went on pilgrimage. He was given the governorship of every city he entered from Sāmarrā to Mecca and Medina. His name was mentioned in the Friday sermons.²

While in the heart-lands of the Caliphate the age of the Turkish generals had set, in Khurāsān the ascendancy of the Tahirid families, was confirmed. In North Africa, the Aghlabids, ruling from their capital Qairawān were even more firmly established as a ruling dynasty than the Tahirids. The family was strongly entrenched in its position since the days of Harūn al-Rashīd. Distant from the ruling province of Irāq, the province of Ifrīqiya, under the Aghlabids, was independent but in name. In the reign of Mu'taṣim the governorship of the province passed from Ziyādatu Allah b. Ibrāhīm to his brother al-Aghlab in the year 225/839-40 and from al-Aghlab to his son Abū al-'Abbās in the year

1. Tabari, p.1302; E.M., p.110.
 2. Ibid., pp. 1318-19., E.M., p.123.

22/840-1.¹ It was a period in which the Aghlabids were engaged in a series of naval attacks on Sicily and on the Byzantine fleet in its vicinity. There are reports, too, that they were defending the cause of the Abbasid Caliphate against its enemies the Umayyads of Spain and their allies in N. Africa.² Yet there is no mention of these in Tabari, Mas'ūdi or Ya'qūbi under the reign of Mu'taṣim nor of any other information that shows the relation between Mu'taṣim and his governors in Ifrīgiya. (Even Ibn Khaldūn says nothing about these under the reign of Mu'taṣim.)³ These were on the whole interested in events which directly involved the Caliph and his troops. And the Aghlabids did not fall within these.

Syria, always a turbulent province under the Abbasids with its pro-Umayyad tendencies and with its nomadic Arabs, was relatively quiet under Mu'taṣim except for the uprising of the Veiled One mentioned above. Following that immediately after the death of Mu'taṣim, Syria faced al-Wāthiq with a serious revolt in his accession to the

1. Kāmil, VI pp. 350-1, 369.

2. Ibid.

3. One may wonder whether Ibn al-Athīr would not have followed suit had it not been for his sense of belonging to a greater world, writing as he did under the impact of the Crusaders.

Caliphate. The revolt made by the Qaisites in the area of Damascus was quickly put down by the same troops which put down the revolt of the Veiled One.¹

Perhaps more important in dealing with these provinces, with the rise of the generals in mind, is the development which took place in Egypt. Under Ma'mūn Egypt was the scene of a number of serious revolts in which Arabs and Copts took part.² In putting down these revolts Mu'taṣim and Afshīn were instrumental. In the reign of Mu'taṣim the governorship of Egypt was first under Haydar Naṣr al-Soghdi (the Soghdian) and after him under his son al-Muzaffar who succeeded in the year 219/834-5. Both of them ruled as deputies of Ashīnās.³ What is more both Kindi and Maqrīzi report that Mu'taṣim had ordered Haydar to remove the names of the Arabs from the registers of the Dīwān in Egypt and stop paying them the 'Aṭā' - the payments which they used to have from the state.⁴ This was done in 219/834-5 and was resisted by the Arabs in vain.⁵ Maqrīzi comments that

1. Kāmil, VI, p.376, 'Ibar, III, p.573. Tabari does not mention this.
2. Tabari, years 214-16; Maqrīzi: Khitat I, pp.334-40; al-Kindi, Kitāb al-Wulāt, pp.185-7.
3. al-Kindi, op.cit., p.196.
4. Kindi: Kitāb al-Wulāt, pp.193-4, Maqrīzi: Khitat, II, p.43.
5. Maqrīzi, op.cit., p.43.

the period of good fortune for the Arabs in Egypt thus came to an end and the armies of Egypt became of the ~~Mawālī~~ the non-Arabs and the Mawālī since the time of Mu'tasim.¹ The importance of this phase in the history of Egypt as an Abbasid province can hardly be sufficiently emphasized. With the break between the local Arab and Muslim elements in Egypt and its Governors appointed from Iraq, the rule of the latter - like that of the Caliph himself in Iraq - was deprived of local support and dependent on foreign troops. With the appropriate help in Iraq, ambitious and far sighted generals were in time to find their way to Egypt and with sufficient support there were to establish their dynasties² - as the Aghlabids and the Taharids had done. The one vital difference was that the soldiers in Egypt, as pointed out by Maqrīzī were of foreign origin, the same as with those of the Caliph in Irāq. But this had yet to happen. For the short reign of Mu'tasim Egypt was on the whole quiet after the year

1. Ibid.

2. E.I. (2) s.v. Aḥmad b. Ṭulūn, E.I. (1) s.v., Ikhshīdids

219/834-5. So was Yaman. Hijāz had for long remained so - but for the Holy Places, Mecca and Medina, it had little or nothing to offer in the political turmoil of the age.¹

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1. The Mihna and the building of Sāmarra are treated in Chapters I and IV respectively. Mu'tasim's sacking of his Christian secretary al-Faḍl b. Mārwan is left out as this has been dealt with at length by Sourdel. See his: Le Visirat Abbaside, pp. 246-54. There are some references in some sources to Mu'tasim's winning naval battles in the Indian Ocean against some Indian barges. No sufficient details are given. Balādhuri: Futūh, V, p. 626; Mas'ūdi: Tanbīh, p. 355; Ibn al-Faḡīh: Buldan, p. 53.

The End of the Reign

On Thursday the 19th of Rabī' 19/6th of January 842 Mu'taṣim's reign came to a close. Early in the morning of that day he died. The difficulty met in trying to ascertain the date of his birth is not encountered here. On this fateful and important date the sources are all agreed.¹

For over a month, according to Tabari, Mu'taṣim was suffering from a malady which beset him after being cupped (ihtajama). On the evening before his last day he felt some improvement in his health. He asked that the barge al-Zulāl be prepared for an excursion on the Tigris the following day. In the barge he asked for a small quantity of wine while listening to some verses sung to the accompaniment of a flute. (As usual, fate had it that the verses were sad and melancholic.)² All the while he was weeping, sobbing and wiping his tears.

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1. Abū Tammām, Muntaḥayāt, p.105; Ya'qūbi, III, p.204; Idem, Bulḍān, p.39; Ibn Qutaiba: Ma'ārif pp.226-7; Dīnawari: Akhbar, p.401; Tabari, p.1322; E.M., p.126; Mās'ūdi, VII, p.144; idem: Tanbih, p.353; Suyūṭi, p.133; Ibn Kathir: Bidayā, p.295; al-Muḥabbar, p.42; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih: Iqd, III, p.55; cf. Chapter II, p.58; Bar-Habraeus, I, p.140, gives the year as 843., E.M., p.126, gives the date of that Thursday as the 18th/5th. According to Cattenoz, Tables, it was the 19th/6th.
 2. cf. Tabari: pp. 909-10.

He returned home before having finished the wine he asked for. About two hours after midnight he died. He was buried in Sāmarra, in al-Jawsaq, one of his famous palaces.¹ The burial ceremony was led by Ahmad b. Abi Du'ād according to Dīnawarī and by the Caliph's son and successor according to others.²

His reign had lasted for eight years, eight months and a couple of days according to the Muslim Calendar, eight years, three months and twenty-eight days according to the Gregorian one.³ His age on his death was between forty-six and forty-eight, as the date of his birth is uncertain.⁴ Although Ṭabari's calculations show that he did not reach the age of forty-eight, this was the age at which the sources, including Ṭabari himself, usually report that he died. The reason for this was that number eight fitted well with the name al-Muthamman, the eight sided, which was attributed to him. It appears that he was so called only after his death. For this name the sources give various reasons, ranging from the

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1. Ṭabari, pp. 1322-3; E.M., pp. 126-7; Ya'qūbi, III, p. 204; Mas'ūdi, VII, p. 144.
 2. Dīnawarī, Akhbār, p. 401; Ya'qūbi: op.cit., p. 204; al-Muḥabbar, p. 42; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih; see p. 55, Iqd, III, p. 58 n.1.
 3. The sources differ in the number of the days. The number above is calculated to include both days of accession and death. Ṭabari's and Mas'ūdi's versions agree with this.
 4. Ṭabari, pp. 1323-4; E.M., pp. 126-8; cf. Chapter, II, p.

dates of his birth, his accession, his death and his age, the length of his reign, the number of his children, his being the eighth Abbasid Caliph and of the eighth generation of the descendants of al-'Abbās, to the number of his campaigns and conquests. In most cases eight reasons were looked for but in al-Fakhri eleven are given.¹

He was described as a man of medium height, a graceful strong and a well-built body, with a beautiful face, beautiful eyes, no grey hairs and a long beard. He was said to be brave, generous, noble, humble, venerable, amiable but when seized with anger did not care what he did. Luxurious in his habits, he liked solid buildings and was free in spending on campaigns. Ibn Hamdūn reports that none was known to have been as alert in the field of war as Mu'tasim.²

So much was said about Mu'tasim. But the sources offer little, and then very casually, on him as a man and as a Caliph.³ In one place Tabari reports the story

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1. p.214 n. 1. The reason given for the name, including the length of his reign, his age and similar things which were noticed after his death, also suggest that it was not used during his lifetime.
 2. Tabari, pp.1324-6; E.M., pp.127-30; Mas'ūdi, VII, p.144 and VIII, p.302; idem: Tanbih, pp.353-5; al-Fakhri, p.316; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih: 'Iqd, III, pp.55-6; Bar Habraeus, I, p.133. Abū Tammām, Muntagayāt, pp.11-91; 104-5, had some of his best poetry on Mu'tasim.
 3. cf. E.M., pp. xvi-xvii.

of the elderly man who spoke to Mu'taṣim in harsh words about the conduct of his troops and how the guards were about to stop the man but for the intervention of Mu'taṣim who listened to the former's complaint and went away. In another place he reports that while on the Byzantine campaign Mu'taṣim and his companions had to cross a river. Mu'taṣim stopped his companions and waded through the water to discover the suitable place and thereby spared his followers the dangers of the attempt.¹ Mas'ūdi tells of the incident when Mu'taṣim came across an old man trying desperately to put a load of hay on the back of his donkey. The load had fallen in a muddy place and was too heavy for the man to handle. Notwithstanding the dirt and the weight, and to the man's astonishment and gratitude, Mu'taṣim lifted it and put it where it was wanted.² Tanūkhī throws some light on Mu'taṣim the father. He was keen that his son Harūn al-Wathīq had a proper education but did not like to see him severely punished in the course of it. Another incident shows that Mu'taṣim

1. Tabari, pp. 1181, 1326; E.M., pp. 17, 129.
 2. Mas'ūdi, VII, pp. 133-4.

was careful not to give al-Wāthiq too much to spend.¹

From the rôle he played in the events of his reign, already described, his efficiency as a general, his proneness to extreme anger, his luxurious habits and his love for buildings could, be convincingly attested.²

But, contrary to E. Marin's judgment, Mu'tasim was not a zealot; despite his being counted among the Mu'tazilite leaders by Ibn al-Murtaḍā.³

With Mu'tasim's death the first reign in that 'Era of Isolation' came to an end.⁴ The accession of his eldest son Hārūn al-Wāthiq followed as a matter of course without opposition or jubilation. Though there was hardly any mention of his having been nominated for the Caliphate by his father, there were sufficient indications that he was meant to succeed. In a number of important occasions he had deputized for his father. The absence of a reference to nomination in the available sources is not a proof that it did not take place and even if the case was such it might have been due to the apparently unexpected

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1. Tanukhi, Nishwār, 8, pp. 13-4; Ibn al-'Abbār, I'tāb, p. 59.
 2. See above Chapters IV and V.
 3. E.M., p. xvii; Ibn al-Murtaḍā: Tabaqāt, p. 123.
 4. See Chapter III, p. 112 and Chapter IV.

death of Mu'tasim.¹

What is worthy of note is that the whole matter was reported in a manner different from that of previous similar events in Baghdād. A feeling of distance and detachment prevailed. With the moving of the capital to Sāmarra, succession appears to have become solely of local concern, arousing little or no interest so long as it was not accompanied by troubles. What is more, the sources for the period were distant and detached from Sāmarra, which neither then nor later became a cultural capital like Baghdād, Cairo, Damascus and others. The court was no longer the centre of cultural development in Iraq. The political decline of the Caliphate, like the 'withering of the State' took place at a time when Islamic Civilization was reaching its peak.²

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1. Tabari: pp. 1180, 1229, 1315; E.M., pp. 16, 53, 120; Kāmil, VI, p. 319; 'Ibar II, p. 257; cf. A. Chejani: Succession p. 141. Abu Tammam, Muntagayāt, p. 89, invoked Mu'tasim to name Wathiq as successor in the same poem in which the burning of Afshin was celebrated. Di'bil, Muntagayāt, p. 124, proclaims that Mu'tasim lived long enough to see that homage was paid to Wathiq. This was said in the last of three verses recited on the occasion of the death of the former and the accession of the latter. Di'bil detested both of them. It is possible that the necessity of the poetic metre he used which produced the phrase which gives the impression that homage was in fact paid to Wathiq in his father's reign.
 2. cf. Mez: Die Renaissance des Islams; B. Lewis: The Arabs in History; Gibb: Interpretation; Goitein: The Rise.

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